NEW TESTAMENT HOURS

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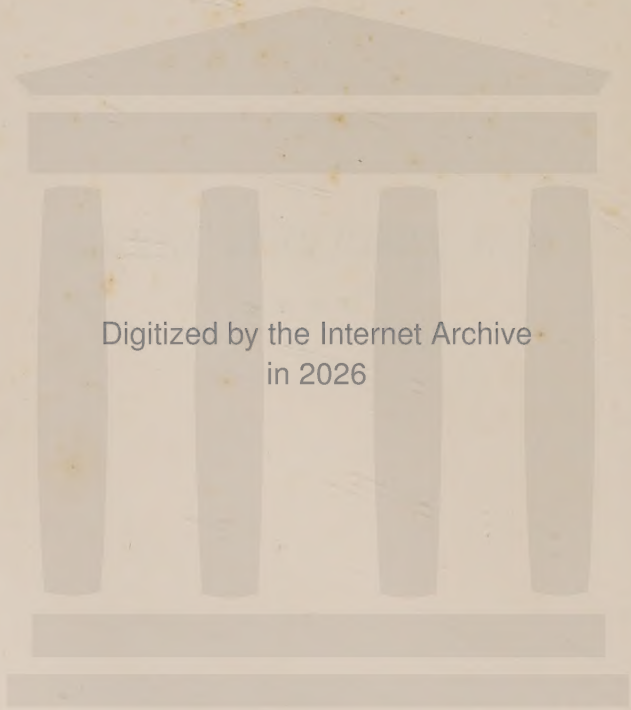
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NEW TESTAMENT HOURS

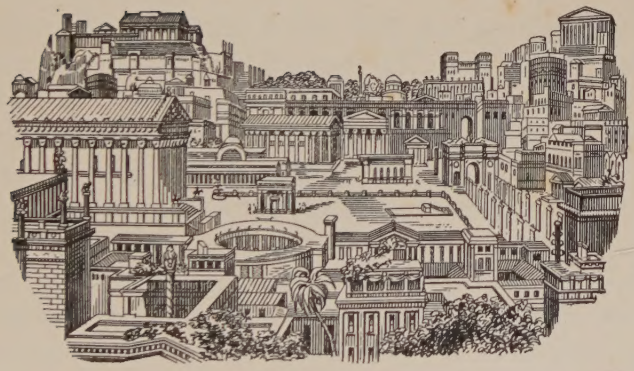
BY

CUNNINGHAM GEIKIE, D.D., LL.D.

LATE VICAR OF ST. MARTIN AT PALACE, NORWICH

VOL. IV.

ST. PETER TO REVELATION



ANCIENT ROME—THE FORUM RESTORED

NEW YORK

JAMES POTT & COMPANY

1905

PREFACE

THIS volume finishes the series of "Hours with the Bible," which now embraces both the Old and New Testaments. The undertaking has cost me so many years' labour that if the favour it meets bear any proportion to the toil in carrying it out, I shall be one of the most popular writers of the day.

The wide sale of the earlier edition of the Old Testament section, both in England and America, and the constant requests to illustrate the New Testament in the same way, have been my abiding encouragement in producing a new edition of the Old Testament portion, brought carefully up to the present date, in every branch of study involved, and in adding to it the volumes on the New Testament. My aim, throughout, has been to realise the idea of Dr. Arnold, by supplying, for all classes, "a true, comprehensive, popular Handbook of the Bible, keeping back none of the counsel of God, lowering no truth, chilling no lofty or spiritual sentiment; yet neither silly, fanatical, nor sectarian;" and I gratefully accept the assurance of many members of the episcopal bench, of scholars, clergy, ministers, private students of Scripture, and the press, both here and in America, that, in their opinion, I have given them just what Dr. Arnold so much wished.

The photographs in the present volume were chiefly taken during my visit to Asia Minor and Palestine this year. I return my best thanks for the use of them to the Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett and H. G. Powell, Esq.

I trust that the easy narrative of the historical surroundings of the Sacred Books, and the brief elucidatory amplifications of the text of the Prophets, Epistles, &c., will be found to save readers the painful labour of consulting disjointed commentaries. In these volumes they get the marrow of the best and latest studies of the different books, condensed into few words, and presented, I hope, in an attractive and simple form pleasant to the ordinary reader, while even professional students will not, I believe, find the same amount of reliable information in any single work. I have gathered the honey for them from a great many flowers, as each volume sufficiently shows. This is not boasting, but the literal truth.

That the Heavenly Father may honour me by making my labours subservient to the glory of His great name, and the advancement of the Kingdom of His Son, our divine Lord, is my earnest prayer.

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HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

ST. PETER TO REVELATION

CHAPTER I

ST. PETER

THAT the story of St. Paul might be given continuously I passed for the time over the Epistles of St. Peter, though Peter's First Epistle is thought by some to have been written as early as A.D. 54, when Paul was on his third great missionary journey. Most authorities, however, assign both Epistles to the close of the apostle's life, which probably was almost coincident with that of St. Paul.

The relations as such, to each other, of the two great leaders, is one of the most interesting subjects in the Apostolic Church History. From the first, Peter's distinctly Hebraistic type of Christianity must have marked him out as especially the Apostle of the Circumcision, that is, of the Jewish race, and hence Paul describes him as no less suited to this sphere than he himself to that of the Apostle of the Gentiles, or non-Jewish populations.[1] A pious Israelite, it apparently seemed a fixed conviction with him that the continued observance of the Mosaic

[1] Gal. ii. 8, 9.

Law—the divinely revealed rule of life for his people—was necessary. A Jew, working only among Jews, there would be nothing to raise the question how this retention of the Mosaic ordinances was to be reconciled with his fundamental principle, that salvation was to be found only by faith in the name of Jesus.[1] He knew, indeed, that in Him all families of the earth would be blessed,[2] and that, to bring this about, God would "call" the "far off" heathen.[3] But he clung to the fond belief that the salvation brought by Christ was designed first for the sons of the ancient Covenant, the people of Israel,[4] and only with and through them for the heathen. He could not, therefore, believe that his race, though it had rejected his Lord, would finally refuse the testimony borne by the apostles to His having risen from the dead, or hesitate to accept Him, when thus shown to have been accepted by God as the Messiah. This must have confirmed him in the thought that he and his apostolic brethren, chosen evidently in allusion to the twelve tribes, should confine their first labours to their own nation,[5] putting off the idea of a simultaneous mission to the heathen the more readily, since the strictly legal observance of the Mosaic Law, to which his own hereditary bias, and the prejudices of his people, whom he desired to win, committed him, virtually precluded his intimate access to the Uncircumcised.

So strong indeed was this feeling that, as we have seen, it needed a special divine intimation before he could bring himself to enter the quarters even of the Centurion Cornelius, at Cæsarea, almost a lord in the eyes of a poor fisherman from the lake of Tiberias, and moreover, already,

[1] Acts ii. 21, 38; iv. 12. [2] Acts iii. 25. [3] Acts ii. 39.
[4] Acts iii. 25, 26; x. 36. [5] Acts x. 42.

as "a proselyte of the gate," nearer Judaism than ordinary heathen. Nor did he feel free to administer baptism to the Centurion's household till extraordinary spiritual attestations of their favour with God had shown themselves.[1] It is, therefore, probable that, like the then existing Church as a whole, he drew no inference from this isolated incident, as to any future missionary efforts, and that, apostles and "brethren" alike, confined themselves, as before, to labours among Jews only.[2]

This attitude of Peter has been urged by some critics as a conclusive proof that the friendliness of the apostle to the Church at Antioch, implied in Acts, is a mere invention. But there was no reason why Peter should not make an exception from his usual rule in favour of a Church gathered from the heathen outside Palestine, honoured as it had been by the evident blessing of God. The Church at Jerusalem had, indeed, as a body, shown their friendly interest in the new community gathered in the Syrian capital by Hellenistic Jews, by their sending Barnabas to it, and in this sympathy Peter doubtless shared. He, and Jewish-Christians generally, were, however, forced, as they supposed, to take a new position when the heathen-born element threatened to take foremost place in the Church at arge, after the success of Paul in his mission to the ntiles. The excitement thus roused led the stricter legalists in the Jerusalem brotherhood to insist that acceptance of Judaism was necessary, even for Gentile converts, as a condition of salvation; and in consequence of this the congregation at Antioch sought an official decision on so weighty a matter from the apostles and the mother-Church at

[1] Acts x. 44–47. [2] Acts xi. 19.

Jerusalem.[1] Influenced, no doubt, by his experience with Cornelius at Cæsarea, Peter, with James, and their circle, met the representations of Paul, as has been related, with a friendly compromise, relieving heathen-born converts from the yoke of necessary submission to Jewish rites

Gilded glass with heads of SS. Peter and Paul. The two apostles have over them a single crown of victory, as if to show that "in their death they were not divided.

and observances, and thus leaving it open to the Jewish Christian brethren to have a comparatively friendly intercourse with them. The wavering and weak attitude of Peter towards the Syrian Church, by breaking off

[1] Acts xv. 4.

social intercourse with its members in their common meals, when some fierce Judaists had come down from Jerusalem to rekindle the Jewish controversy,[1] in no degree contradicts the earlier spirit related in the Acts, but simply proves that the constitutional impulsiveness which Peter had so often shown, down to his momentary denial of his Master, still swayed him in any crisis. He must, moreover, have been alarmed lest such liberal views as he had upheld might destroy his influence in his own special mission to his people; nor may his mind have been quite clear from the hereditary prejudices which had been condemned in relation to Cornelius and his household. To extend the principle laid down in a special case, to a rule universally applicable, might well be difficult for one till recently holding opinions so opposite. If the Gentile had been excused from the strict observance of the law, the Jew was still understood to continue, as a Christian, faithful to the divinely-imposed customs of his race. That these could not be followed exactly outside Palestine, and that their unconditional imposition as obligatory would paralyse any attempts to unite Jews and heathen converts in Christian fellowship, was an experience yet to be made by Peter, so that we need not wonder at his wavering when the difficulty first rose in full force before him. But when met by the unanswerable arguments of Paul, as the inflexible apostle of religious liberty, and when the disastrous results of the narrowness to which he had temporarily given way were thus pointed out, there is no doubt that he realised his false position, and accepted the wider ideas of Paul, for there is not the

[1] Gal. ii. 11 ff.

least trace to be found in the Epistles of any permanent difference between them.[1]

Of the later story of St. Peter little is told. After his wonderful escape from sharing the fate of James the brother of John, under Herod Agrippa,[2] he had to flee from Jerusalem, but the fancy that he then went to Rome, and founded a Church there, is demonstrably an invention, since we find that he made his home again in the Holy City, after the death of the persecutor;[3] and Paul's Epistle to the Roman Church could not have failed to allude to its relation to so illustrious an apostle, if Peter had established it. Its origin, indeed, ran back to years before Paul set out on his great mission to Achaia,[4] and it can only have been connected with Peter through the reports and zeal of some who had heard his preaching, when at the Feasts in Jerusalem.[5] The main agents in its creation were, in fact, evidently unknown followers of Paul, such as those, we may fancy, who gained a footing for the new faith in Crete and many other places.[6] Nor is there any proof that Peter visited Corinth, from the existence there of a party using his name; the presence in the city of a number of Palestine Jewish-Christians, and the anxieties of weak-minded brethren, naturally leading some to rally under the name of the leader of Jewish-Christian ideas, as a stand against the dominant extravagances of such as carried Paul's great doctrine of spiritual freedom beyond just limits.[7]

Of the later traditional notices of the apostle it is hard to make any reliable or satisfactory story. That he

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 22; xv. 9, 11; 2 Peter iii. 15.
[2] Acts xii.
[3] Acts xv. 7; Gal. ii. 9.
[4] Rom. xv. 23.
[5] Acts ii. 10.
[6] See Geikie's St. Paul, vol. ii., p. 547.
[7] 1 Cor. viii.-x.

suffered martyrdom is generally admitted, not only from the words of Christ,[1] but from such strong testimony as that of the Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, which dates as far back as the last years of the first century.[2] "Let us set before us," it says, "the good apostles: Peter, who through unholy zeal (of enemies), suffered not one or two but many trials, and having thus endured martyrdom, departed to that place of glory due to him."[3] It is not stated that this happened at Rome, but no other place is suggested, and it seems natural to assume that Clement, writing from Rome, intended that city to be understood, especially since he presently joins the two apostles Peter and Paul, with "a great multitude of the elect, who have suffered in our midst." Papias, a bishop of Hierapolis, a city on the borders of Phrygia, in Asia Minor—a diligent collector of Church traditions—living about A.D. 100, and a friend of the daughters of Philip the Evangelist, then still alive, relates in one of the fragments of his writings which have come down to us, as a tradition derived from a presbyter, that the Gospel of St. Mark was composed at Rome, from the directions of St. Peter, whose interpreter he was; thus assigning Rome as the home of the apostle in the closing period of his life.[4] The presence of St. Peter at Rome is, moreover, expressly stated by authorities of the middle of the second century, and of a generation later.[5] Irenæus,

[1] John xxi. 18, 19.

[2] *Pat Apost. Opera.* ed. Gebhardt and Harnack, i. lix. lx.

[3] 1 Pet. v. 3, 4.

[4] Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.*, book ii. 15; iii. 39; vi. 14 and 25.

[5] *Acta Petri et Pauli*, ed. Hilgenfeld, iv. 68; *Prædicatio Petri*, ed. Hilgenfeld, iv. 57; Dionysius of Corinth., c. A.D. 170, quoted in Euseb. *Ch. Hist.* ii. 25.

bishop of Lyons in A.D. 177,[1] says that Peter and Paul preached the Gospel in Rome, and founded the Church. Tertullian, born at Carthage about A.D. 150 or 160, and living well on into the century after,[2] extols Rome in his rhetorical way, as the place where Peter endured suffering like that of his Lord; where Paul met the same death as John the Baptist, and the Apostle John was plunged in boiling oil without being harmed, and then banished to an island. Clement of Alexandria,[3] who died, an old man, about A.D. 220, speaks of Peter's being in Rome; and a Roman presbyter, Caius, who lived about A.D. 310, is quoted by Eusebius as appealing, in support of the tradition of the death of both Peter and Paul at Rome, to their tombs in the Vatican, and on the Ostian road, respectively. The worth of these testimonies, however, coming to us at long intervals after the events noted, in a time when things did not get smaller as time passed, is, I fear, worth little more than its mere repetition of the belief in Peter's having ended his days at Rome; to judge by a curious instance that has revealed the doubtful character of ecclesiastical tradition generally. Justin Martyr, who was born about the year 100, and thus entered life as the Apostle John left it, in referring to Simon Magus, whom a Jewish-Christian tradition had transferred to Rome, and had represented as there exposed by St. Peter, corroborates his narrative by telling how the impostor so bewitched the Senate and people, that a statue was erected to him as a god, on one of the islands of the Tiber, in the reign of Claudius,[4] with the inscription "Simoni Deo Sancto."

[1] Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.* iii. 1.
[2] Tertull. *de Præscr.* 36.
[3] Euseb. *Ch. Hist.* iv. 14.
[4] Just. Mart. *Apolog.* lxiii.

In the year 1574, however, a statue was dug up on a Tiber island, with an inscription, "Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio Sacrum," and it was thus seen—this being undoubtedly the statue to which Justin alludes—that it had been raised not to "Simon the Holy God," but to a Sabine deity, Semo Sancus. So radically had tradition blundered even thus early! That Simon was ever at Rome, or ever met St. Peter in a public disputation, is itself only one of the endless vagaries of an age when imagination played the childlike part in the region of faith, which it still does in some quarters, as we see in the exhibition of the seamless coat of our Lord, a generation ago, at Treves, or in the pilgrimages to Lourdes in our own time.

Of all the other early stories respecting the residence of Peter at Rome, the only one which can be confidently accepted is, that John Mark was with him in the great city, and after the apostle's death wrote his Gospel from what he had heard from his Master. All else, beyond the fact that Peter met his end at Rome, may be traced back to unhistorical grounds. We must thus discard, as without foundation in fact, even the various threads of tradition repeated by Jerome, who was born in the year 331 and died in the year 420, to prove that Peter became Bishop of Antioch and then laboured in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, proconsular Asia and Bithynia; that he went to Rome in the second year of Claudius, A.D. 42, to encounter Simon Magus, as above noticed, and after presiding there as bishop over the Roman Church for twenty-five years, was crucified, head downwards, in the last year of Nero, A.D. 68, and finally buried on the Vatican hill.[1] The bishopric at Antioch is inferred only

[1] Hieron. *de Vir ill.*, c. 1.

from the mention of his passing visit to that city in Galatians:[1] while his labours over Asia Minor have no more reliable source than the mention of its provinces in the opening of his First Epistle.[2] That he was crucified is stated by Tertullian, who was born at Carthage, or what is now Tunis, about A.D. 160, and died about A.D. 245;[3] but it may perhaps rest only on a literal interpretation of Christ's words to him, in their last interview;[4] nor is it at all certain that the story of his having been crucified head downwards, mentioned by Eusebius, who was born about A.D. 264, and lived in Palestine, his native country, till about A.D. 340, is to be trusted. His authority for it is Origen of Alexandria, who lived from about A.D. 185 to about 253. Exaggeration plays a large part in all the legends of those times. That he was buried on the Vatican hill rests only on the statement of the Roman presbyter Caius, who lived about A.D. 310, that he had seen a memorial there to keep alive the fact of his death as a martyr.[5]

The claim that St. Peter had come to Rome so early as the beginning of the reign of Claudius, and remained there as bishop for twenty-five years, is, beyond doubt, entirely without any historical truth. It rests fundamentally on the fanciful and demonstrably incorrect story of Justin the Martyr respecting Simon Magus having lived in Rome, and there meeting the apostle. With this dream of the apostle having come to Rome thus early, the later tradition of his having died in the last year of Nero must have been joined, to make up the twenty-five years of his supposed episcopacy. The earliest doubtful

[1] Gal. ii. 11 ff. [2] 1 Peter i. 1. [3] Tertull. *de Præscr.* 36.
[4] John xxi. 18. [5] Lipsius, *Quellen*, p. 95.

trace of this legend is in the "Chronicle of Hippolytus," composed about A.D. 240,[1] and used by the Chronicler of the year 354.[2] The then growing habit of seeking a parallel between the lives of St. Paul and St. Peter next led to a new confusion; the founding of the Church of Corinth by the two apostles, in common, being followed by the introduction of the further story of their dying at the same time at Rome.[3] Through this, the death of Paul was transferred, from the year 64, after the burning of Rome, to 681, the last year of Nero, in which tradition had already placed the martyrdom of Peter. The death of the two apostles was, indeed, ultimately declared to have happened on the same day, two bodies assumed to be theirs having been buried together on the 29th June, A.D. 258, and this day gradually being put down as that of their martyrdom, in contradiction to the fact that the persecution under Nero could not have begun earlier than in July or August.[4] Eusebius does not, in his correct text, mention the bishopric of Peter maintained by Jerome; indeed, he rather considers, with Irenæus and the Apostolic Constitutions, that Linus was the first bishop.[5] The absolute unreliableness of the claim of a twenty-five years' primacy at Rome is, moreover, strikingly shown by the fact, that the Chronicler of the year 354 makes that primacy begin immediately after the death of Christ, in the year 30 of our era, and extend only to the year 55; nine years before Nero's outburst of persecution, while, in a treatise sometimes ascribed to

[1] Lipsius, *Chronologie*, 163.
[2] Mommsen in *der phil. hist. Kl. der K. Sächs. Ges. d. Wiss.* i. 1850.
[3] Dionysius of Corinth, cited in Euseb. *Ch. Hist.* ii. 25.
[4] Lipsius, *Chron.* 50.
[5] Euseb. *Ch. Hist.* iii. 2.

Lactantius,[1] but more probably written by Cæcilius, his contemporary, not earlier than A.D. 312,[2] Peter's arrival in Rome is transferred to the reign of Nero.

To add to all, the evidence of the New Testament utterly precludes any twenty-five years' stay of the apostle in Rome. It tells us that Peter was not yet there at the time of the council at Jerusalem, in the year 53,[3] nor at the date of his visit to Antioch at a later period, nor even when Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans; for he must, in that case, as I have said, have been named in the many greetings sent by the apostle. Nor could he have been in Rome even during the time of Paul's detention there, from A.D. 61 to 63; for had Peter been in the city, the fact must have been mentioned in some Epistle. That he came to Rome after Paul's first imprisonment, and that, sooner or later, he fell there, may be admitted, but a veil has been drawn by Providence over the last days alike of Peter and Paul, so that we only know that they were not, for God took them.

Yet, though thus, for now 1800 years, in the presence of the Master whom he had served so long and so faithfully, St. Peter still lives among us in the two Epistles he has left as his sacred legacy to the Church.

Of these, the First Epistle is accepted well-nigh unanimously by critics, as undoubtedly genuine, though a few, without any reasonable ground, suppose it to have been written by John Mark, the friend and assistant of the apostle, from recollections of his teacher's sentiments. Of course there are some who propose a comparatively late date for the Epistle—the end of the first century, or

[1] Lactantius died about A.D. 330.

[2] *De mort. persecutorum.* [3] Acts xv.

even the reign of Hadrian; but this, also, is unsupported by any respectable show of evidence.[1] It may, indeed, safely be assumed to have been written about the middle of the sixties: shortly after the death of St. Paul.[2] That there is no mention in it of the persecution of the year 64, but only of the baleful afterclaps of that tempest, in the provinces of the empire, shows that it could not have been written before the death of St. Paul, who was beheaded in A.D. 64, and this is also shown by its references to the Epistles of that apostle. It is, moreover, improbable that Peter would have written to Churches founded by the Apostle to the Gentiles, during that brother's lifetime. The place of its composition is said to have been Babylon, yet it is difficult to understand this literally. The great city on the Euphrates became in later ages a great centre of Jewish life, but it seems to have lain so entirely desolate during the first century, that nothing but mounds of rubbish marked its site.[3] Josephus, moreover, tells us that the Jews who had settled in Babylonia were driven away, in Caligula's time, by persecution and pestilence.[4] This, however, seems to contradict the idea of complete desolation, and the dispersed Hebrews may have gathered again in Nero's day, to a place so peculiarly dear to them. Thus, it may be, that the literal Babylon may be intended, but it is noteworthy that no one in the first five centuries speaks of Peter having visited the Euphrates, while the Babylon of

[1] Trajan, A.D. 98–117; Baur, Schwegler, Hilgenfeld; Hadrian, A.D. 117–138; Zeller, Holtzmann.

[2] A.D. 63, 64, Wieseler, Ewald, Hofmann, J. Schmid; A.D. 63–68, Huther; A.D. 65, 66, Sieffert and Beyschlag.

[3] Strabo, *Geog.* 16, 738; Pausan. *Arcad.* 33; Plin. *Hist. N.* vi. 26.

[4] Jos. *Ant.* xviii. 9, 8.

the Epistle was understood by Christians universally as meaning Rome, the emblem, in those days, of the existing ungodly world-power, as Babylon had been in the days of the prophets.[1] In Revelation, moreover, Babylon is evidently a name for Rome,[2] and it is used in the same way of the imperial city, not much later, in the Jewish Sybilline Oracles,[3] as, indeed, it had been, even before Peter's Epistle was written, in the Fourth Book of Esdras.[4]

The authority of the Epistle, as a genuine letter of St. Peter, is established with a circumstantiality hardly found in any other of the New Testament writings. It is not only mentioned in the Second Epistle of Peter,[5] but is quoted so literally by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, a disciple of St. John,[6] that Eusebius[7] is justified in speaking of him as having been familiar with it. Papias, also, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia about A.D. 100, and a friend of St. John and Polycarp, is also mentioned by Eusebius as accepting it as genuine,[8] while Irenæus, in the second century, Tertullian,[9] Clement of Alexandria, who died in the first quarter of the third century, Origen, who lived from A.D. 185 to 253, and Cyprian of Carthage, beheaded in A.D. 258, often quote texts from it without ever hinting any doubt as to its authenticity.

Some have challenged its being regarded as Peter's, from supposing him unequal to composing an epistle in Greek; but one brought up in a district so completely penetrated

[1] Isa. xlvii. 1; ii. 6, 7, 9, 22; iii. 14.
[2] Rev. xiv. 8; xvi. 19; xvii. 5; xviii. 2, 10, 21.
[3] v. 153. [4] iii. 1. [5] 2 Pet. iii. 1.
[6] Bishop of Smyrna, A.D. 104 or earlier; martyred there some time between 147 and 175. [7] Euseb. *H. E.* iv. 14.
[8] Euseb. *H. E.* iii. 39. [9] c. 160–245.

with Greek life as Galilee must have been, from its nearness to Grecian Syria, would surely be able to speak the language he had heard all his days, and the Epistle may well, like the Epistles of St. Paul, have been dictated to one trained to write it correctly. The suggestion that he wrote in Aramaic, and had the Epistle translated into Greek by Mark or Silvanus, is without the least support.

That it should be addressed "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion" in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, has been fancied by many to imply that it was intended only for Jewish-Christians in these provinces, which embraced most of Asia Minor; but we know of no churches in these regions except those founded by Paul or his assistants, and we cannot conceive of Peter writing only to the Jewish-Christian portion of churches largely made up of heathen converts, as all gathered by Paul must have been. No distinctly Jewish-Christian churches could have existed in Asia Minor before Paul's second missionary journey, for there are no traces of any, and his founding a Church at Pisidian Antioch shows that, even there where such a Church must have been gathered, if Jewish-Christian effort had preceded his, there was no germ of such an organisation. It is, indeed, evident from the language of the Epistle itself, that the Churches were mainly assemblies of heathen-born converts, for Peter could not have spoken of Jews as not knowing that a life given up to "lusts" was contrary to God's law,[1] since even Christ never reproaches the worst of His Jewish opponents with such ignorance, but only of hypocrisy. Nor could he speak of Jews as "believing in God through Christ,"[2] or of

[1] 1 Pet. i. 14. [2] 1 Pet. i. 21.

"being no people in time past," but now (by their having become Christians) being "the people of God."[1] That they should be called children of Sarah[2] is not inconsistent with this, for they are described, not as physically related to her but only as spiritually, "if they do well, and are not put in fear by any terror."[3] Nor could Jews be spoken of as having lived heathen lives or practising "abominable idolatries,"[4] for Paul, in his great indictment of the Jew, in Romans, has no such charge to bring against his people, though he must have then made it had it been deserved. That Peter should address his Epistle to "the Dispersion" in the different provinces, must, therefore, be regarded as a figurative use of Old Testament language, natural to one still clinging fondly to the past, and readily understood by heathen-born converts, since they were familiar with the ancient Scriptures, their only Bible, which they heard read at every service and constantly quoted by their preachers, and since they had been taught that "Jerusalem was the mother of all" Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles,[5] and that "if they were Christ's, then were they Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."[6] "Sojourners and pilgrims" in this world, they knew that, as the spiritual Israel of God, they should "have their behaviour seemly among the heathen" round them, still unconverted.[7]

The Churches addressed had suffered much at the hands of their pagan neighbours, and possibly, also, at those of the Jews;[8] more, however, by contempt and blasphemy

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 10. [2] 1 Pet. iii. 6. [3] See John viii. 39.
[4] 1 Pet. iv. 3. [5] Gal. iv. 26. [6] Gal. iii. 29.
[7] 1 Pet. ii. 12. [8] 1 Pet. iv. 4.

than from violence, though this, at times, may have broken out.[1] The odious charge of criminal practices in connection with their worship so fatal, already, at Rome, seems indeed to have spread to Asia Minor, since they were in danger, if not very careful, of being accused as "evil doers," and as using their religion as "a cloak to cover wickedness."[2] Their old heathen life had doubtless, also, left its weaknesses, for the apostle has to warn them against the sensual excesses so inveterate among the heathen of that day,[3] and not less against the drunkenness and "abominable idolatries" to which they had, perhaps, formerly been given, and which were so rife on every hand. Nor was a caution against giving way to violent passion, ending, it might be, in bloodshed, or from playing the thief, held below the apostle's regard, or even of being "meddlers in other men's matters."[4]

But though their religion was vilified as mixed up with hateful or criminal practices, including even murder, which was apparently imputed to them in connection with their rites, as it has been even in our own day, to the Jews, in some European countries,[5] there is no sign that the more dangerous accusation was made of its being perilous to the State. Hence we see no traces of persecution by the imperial authorities; the counsel given to be "subject to all the laws, and to all the decrees of magistrates or rulers," implying that they enjoyed peace under them.[6] They were, in fact, simply, as yet, suffering from the bad name given them by heathen and Jews alike, in every part of the empire. Still, the ill-will

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 15, 16, comp. i. 6; iii. 14, 17; iv. 14.
[2] 1 Pet. ii. 12; iii. 16. [3] 1 Pet. ii. 12; iv. 3. [4] 1 Pet. iv. 15.
[5] 1 Pet. ii. 12; iv. 15. [6] 1 Pet. ii. 13.

borne them was not without disastrous effects in some cases, for we read of at least one martyr, at Pergamos;[1] killed, presumably, in some popular tumult.

To brethren in such circumstances, a doctrinal Epistle would have been, we may fancy, of less value for the moment, than the practical counsels and exhortations more natural to our apostle, who did not assume the character of a theological teacher in any systematic way, like a learned rabbi such as St. Paul. It is, therefore, simply devoted to encouragements, warnings, and incitements to keep aloof from moral dangers, to stand firm in their faith, not to go back to their old heathen ways, and to endure to the end, since all their present sufferings were ordained for their eternal good.[2]

The Epistle runs as follows:—

The First Epistle General of Peter.

I. 1. Peter, no longer Simon, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; 2. according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, to obedience to the Gospel, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ—your admission into the new Covenant being made by the atoning blood of Christ, as Israel was admitted to the old Covenant by the sprinkling on them of the blood of the sacrifice which confirmed it:[3] Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied.

Thanksgiving for the blessings of Christianity which outweigh, immeasurably, all the troubles of their new position.

[1] Rev. ii. 13. [2] 1 Pet. iv. 12; v. 12. [3] Exod. xxiv. 8.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; 4. to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and

Bottom of a gilded glass found in the Catacombs. Peter has the rod of Moses, and is striking the Rock, as the successor of the Head of the Jewish Church. Christ had delegated it to Moses, and, after His own ascension, transferred it, as was claimed, to Peter. He it is who strikes the Spiritual Rock, and brings out the Stream of Life, a conception vividly illustrating the metaphor of St. Paul—"They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4).

that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you; 5. who, by the power of God, are safely guarded through your faith, unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, now near at hand.[1] 6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now, for a little

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 7.

while, till Christ come, if need be, ye have been put to grief by many temptations, 7. that the proof of your faith—more precious than gold which perishes in the end, even though it has passed the test of fire,—may be found triumphant, to your praise and glory and honour, at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8. whom ye love though you have not yet seen Him; believing on whom, though now not as yet seeing Him, ye rejoice greatly, with joy unspeakable and already full of glory, as it were, even now; 9. receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

10. Concerning which salvation the Prophets closely sought knowledge, and assiduously searched for illumination—who prophesied of the grace thus to come to you; 11. seeking to find out what time, or what sort of time—how to be recognised—the Spirit of Christ which was in them—for it was he who spoke through them[1] pointed to, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow them. 12. To whom it was revealed that they fore-announced, not for themselves, but for you, these things which now have been made known to you, by them that preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Ghost sent forth from heaven: which things even angels eagerly desire to look into; as it were, bending forward to do so.

Their duty as thus so greatly favoured.

13. Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, as the runner girds up the skirts of his long robe, to leave his limbs free,[2] be sober-minded, and set your hope confidently and completely on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14. as children of obedience, not conforming again to the desires you had in the time of your heathen ignorance, before your conversion; 15. but as He, God, who called you,[3] is holy, so be ye yourselves also holy, in

[1] Luke xii. 12; xxi. 15; John xiv. 26.
[2] Eph. vi. 14. [3] 1 Pet. i. 2.

all manner of living; 16. because it is written, *Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.*[1]

17. And if ye call on Him as Father, who, without respect of persons, judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning, for on earth you are only pilgrims on the way to God,[2] in fear: 18. knowing that ye were redeemed, not with perishable things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; 19. but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ. 20. Who, indeed, was foreknown by God before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times,[3] for your sake: 21. who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God.

22. Seeing then that ye have purified your souls, in your obedience to the truth, which leads to unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: 23. having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and imperishable word of God. 24. For *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth:* 25. *but the word of the Lord abideth for ever.*[4] And this is the word of good tidings which was preached to you.

II. 1. Putting away, therefore, all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2. as new-born babes seek earnestly the spiritual milk that is without guile offered in the Word,[5] that we may grow thereby, unto salvation; 3. if indeed ye have *tasted that the Lord is gracious.*[6] 4. To whom coming, to change the figure, as to a living foundation stone,[7] able, as such, to give life to all the spiritual temple raised on it, rejected indeed of men, but chosen by God and precious, 5. be ye also, as living stones

[1] Lev. xix. 2. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 11; i. 4. [3] 1 Pet. i. 5; Heb. i. 2.
[4] Isa. xl. 6–8. [5] 1 Pet. i. 23. [6] Ps. xxxiv. 8.
[7] Ps. cxviii. 22; Ps. xxviii. 16; Matt. xxi. 42; Acts iv. 11; Rom. ix. 33.

are, built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood,[1] to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6. This is sure, because it stands written in Scripture: *Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame.* 7. For you, therefore, who believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve, *The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner:* 8. and, *A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;*[2] for they stumble because they are disobedient to the Word: to which fate also they were appointed for their disobedience. 9. But ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people formed by God for Himself, as His own,[3] that ye may show forth the glories of Him who called you out of heathen darkness into His marvellous light: 10. who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11. Beloved, I beseech you, as sojourners and pilgrims in this world, to keep away from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12. living a seemly life among the heathen round you; that, in that separation from heathen ways because of which they speak of you as evil doers, they may, by your good works which they behold, glorify God in the day of His gracious visitation, bringing them repentance and mercy.

The fitting relation of Christians to the heathen authorities.

13. Render obedience to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14. or to governors, as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the approving recognition of them that do well. 15. For so is the will of God, that by well doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16. as free, not slaves, bound to do human laws, right or wrong, and yet

[1] Rev. i. 6; v. 10; xx. 6; Exod. xix. 6.
[2] Isa. viii. 14. [3] Isa. xliii. 21.

not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but acting as the bondservants of God. 17. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

The fitting relation of Christian slaves to their owners

18. Ye household slaves, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. 19. For this is acceptable before God, if for conscience toward God to hinder any reproach on Christianity a man silently endure griefs, even when suffering wrongfully. 20. For what credit is it, if, when ye do wrong and get blows for it, or other slave punishment, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well and yet suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 21. For God requires you as called by Him to act thus: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps. 22. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: 23. who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. 24. Who, His own self, of His free-will, bare our sins in His own body upon the tree, the punishment of slaves, that we Christians, having, in His death, died unto sins, the sinful life of the past, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.[1] 25. For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

The poor household slaves and the like, of whom the churches largely consisted, would at once understand that Christ was the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls intended, since the head of the little company of Christians to which they belonged was indifferently called the one or the other. As *he* was the Shepherd or Bishop of a single congregation, Christ naturally was honoured as both, towards all believers.

[1] Isa. liii. 5.

The fitting relations of married women to their husbands.

III. 1. In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that even if any obey not the word, they may, without having the word, be won over to the faith by the life of their wives; 2. beholding your chaste behaviour shown in your modest fear of coming short in any way in your duty to them. 3. Whose adorning, let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; 4. but let it be the adornment of the inner man of the heart, in the incorruptible charm of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price. 5. For in this way, in the old time, did the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorn themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: 6. as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him *lord*:[1] whose children ye have become, if ye do well, and do not let yourselves be put in fear by any terror leading you to make unchristian compliances either to your husband or to the heathenism round you.

It is striking to find the apostle telling wives that they are to "be in subjection" to their husbands, "in the same manner," as house-slaves were to their masters,[2] but this is quite in keeping with the ideas of antiquity.[3]

We are next told how husbands are to bear themselves towards their wives.

7. Ye husbands, in like manner, live with your wives as becomes your Christian knowledge, giving honour to the woman as to the weaker vessel, not treating her roughly, or dismissing her even if still unconverted, but thinking of her,

[1] Gen. xviii. 12. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 18; iii. 1.
[3] Eph. v. 22–24; Col. iii. 18; 1 Tim. ii. 9–15.

as being, no less than yourselves, joint-heirs of the grace of eternal life, if they accept it; that your prayers for yourself, or for her conversion, be not hindered by your unworthiness.

Summary and reinforcement of all these exhortations.

8. Finally, be all of you, like minded, full of kindly feeling, loving each other as Christian brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded; 9. not returning evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but, contrariwise, blessing:[1] for ye were called

An Egyptian lady with her lady's-maids attending on her.

for the very end that ye should inherit a blessing, and this may well be a spur to your seeking blessings on others. 10. For it is written, *He that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips, that they speak no guile:* 11. *and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it.* 12. *For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears* are open *to their prayer: but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil,* to judge them.[2]

[1] Isa. liii. 7; Matt. xxvii. 39; John viii. 48, 49.

[2] Ps. xxxiv. 12–16, LXX.

Real harm cannot overtake the worthily-living Christian, for even suffering for his faith is a blessing in the end.

13. And if all this be so, who is he who will harm you, if ye be zealots for what is good? 14. But even if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, ye are still blessed. Have therefore no fear of them, your persecutors, and do not be disquieted: 15. but sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts; ready, always, to give answer to every one who asks you for a justification of the hope that is in you; yet with meekness, and fear of God: 16. having a good conscience; that as concerns those points on which you are spoken against, they may be put to shame, who revile your good manner of life in Christ. 17. For it is better that ye suffer for well doing, if it be the will of God that ye do suffer, than for evil doing. 18. Because Christ also suffered for sins once, a righteous one for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit to a new higher life; 19. in which nature also, he went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20. who in former times were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited, in the days of Noah, while the Ark was preparing: in which a few souls, that is, eight, were saved through water.

21. Which also,—the water of Noah's flood—in its antitype, or anticipatory image of a type—baptism—now saves you, as the water did those saved in the Ark; not, however, the mere putting away the filth of the flesh, but the questioning and answers at baptism of one who has a good conscience toward God—through loving, obedient faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: 22. who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject to Him.[1]

The fitting results on Christians of their Lord having thus suffered for them.

[1] Heb. i. 6, 13; iv. 14; vi. 20.

IV. 1. Forasmuch, then, as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind, to be willing, like Him, to suffer even to death; for he that has suffered in the flesh has shown himself a sincere Christian who has ceased from sin; 2. this suffering having been sent you that ye should live no longer, the rest of your time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, —but to the will of God. 3. For the time past may suffice to have wrought the evil which is the desire of the heathen, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, drunkenness, wine-feasts, bacchanalian excesses, and abominable idol rites; 4. your not running into the same excess of riot, in these ways, as they, the heathen do, being thought by them strange, and making them speak evil of you: 5. who shall give account, however, not to them, but to Him who is about to judge the quick and the dead. 6. For to this end was the gospel preached even to the brethren now dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh—persecuted and defamed,—but live according to God in the Spirit—here, and beyond.

The great consolation, amidst surrounding dangers of temptation and impending persecution, is that "the end of all things is at hand;" a thought that may well rouse them to earnestness in all the graces and duties of the Faith. Peter, like the other apostles, regards Christ's Coming as very near, and as bringing with it the close of the existing state of things: the judgment of the heathen and impenitent, and the glory of believers.

7. But the end of all things is at hand: be thoughtful-minded, therefore; having your spirit always sobered into the frame for prayer. 8. Above all things, being fervent in your love among yourselves: for, to use the Jewish proverb,[1] *love covers a multitude of sins* in our fellows; 9. using hospitality to one another without murmuring at inconveniences it may cause. 10. According as each one of you has

[1] Prov. x. 12.

received a spiritual gift, see to your making use of it among yourselves, as churches, as becomes good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11. If any man has the gift of speaking in the congregation, let him speak as it were communications from God; if any man serve in any other way, in the brotherhood, let him do so as inspired by the strength which God supplies: that in all things done, God may be glorified, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The Churches are already suffering from their enemies, and the apostle directs them how to meet these trials.

12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial now broken out among you,—which comes on you to prove you [1]—as though a strange thing happened to you: 13. but so far as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice in the fact that, at the revelation of His glory, ye may also rejoice with exceeding joy. 14. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, because you are His, ye are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

15. For you must let no one of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a meddler in matters that do not concern him; 16. but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in bearing this name of Christian. 17. For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God,—the members of his family, the Church;—and if it begin first with us, what will the end be of them that do not obey the gospel of God? 18. And if the righteous—the true member of God's house or family—is with difficulty saved from giving way before the present fiery trial of his faith, and finds it hard to be ready for the great day, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear when it comes? 19. Let, then, those who suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls to a faithful Creator, with patient continuance in doing well.

[1] 1 Pet. i. 6 ff.

Exhortations as to the inner life of the various churches, in the different orders composing them.

V. 1. The elders, that is, the "presbyters," "overseers," or "bishops" among you—the various churches I address—I therefore exhort, who am also a fellow elder or presbyter, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed at Christ's coming. 2. Take a shepherd's care of the flock of God which is among you, discharging your office as overseers not unwillingly, but with the heart, as God requires; and not for the sake of filthy lucre, but from a love of the work: 3. neither as lording it over your respective charges—as presbyter-bishops of the separate churches, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock.

The word translated "charges" is plural; showing that the different presbyters addressed had each a distinct congregation under his superintendence. This explanation of the verse is supported by Huther, Wiesinger, De Wette, and Von Soden, among others.

4. And when the Chief Shepherd shall be revealed, ye shall receive the unfading amaranth-crown of glory. 5. Likewise, ye younger men, serving in any way, in or for, the congregation, be subject to the elders, your rulers. Yea, all of you, gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another; gird yourself with it, I say, as your "Enkombomo," which you know, is the long coarse apron or frock worn by slaves at their work: for God sets Himself against the proud, but shows favour to the humble.[1] 6. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the appointed time;[2] 7. casting all your anxious care on Him, for He careth for you. 8. Be sober-minded, be watchful; your accuser before God, the devil,[3]

[1] Prov. iii. 34. [2] 1 Pet. i. 7; iv. 13. [3] Rev. xii. 10.

as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9. whom resist, strong in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being endured by your brethren who are anywhere in the world. 10. But the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ — after that ye have suffered a little while—shall himself make you perfect, stablish you firmly in your faith, and strengthen you to overcome every adversary. 11. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever, Amen.

12. By Silvanus, our faithful brother, in my opinion, I have written to you briefly, exhorting you, and testifying that this to which I exhort you, is the true grace of God: stand ye fast in it. 13. She, the Church, in Babylon, elect together with you, salutes you;[1] and so does Mark, my son. 14. Salute one another with a kiss of love.

Peace be to you all that are in Christ.

[1] The feminine article only is used, and hence the Revised Version begins the verse with "She," but the word for "Church" is feminine and it is natural that St. Peter should personify it by the article.

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER

That the claim of the Sacred Books to their august authority, should be a matter beyond reasonable question, is an indispensable condition of our confidence in their teaching. To censure the closest criticism of any of them is, therefore, not only a distrust of its right to a place in the Canon, but saps the very basis of our faith. Yet it is no easy task to come to unchallengeable conclusions, for nothing is more easy than to suggest difficulties as to the authorship of any ancient documents, especially when two or more writings are ascribed to the same person. Indeed, even when a single composition is dissected, we may find plausible reasons, if it be at all long, for regarding it as the work of various men, perhaps in different ages. We see this in the case of the Iliad, over which the fiercest controversy raged in the last century; some maintaining that it was the work of a succession of poets, during unknown periods: others, that it bore clear proofs of being the production of one mind. All the books of the New Testament have been rightly subjected to criticism as keen, but have, as the result, been finally set on a foundation of evidence in their favour such as their claims demand.

Of all the portions of the New Testament, none has been more freely challenged, or more sharply disputed,

than the Second Epistle of St. Peter. The revolutionary school of modern critics, indeed, have maintained that a false Peter, at a later time, composed it, unskilfully, by a free use of the Epistle of Jude; but in this case, as in so many others, where modern scholars have started strange theories, the old flag still waves, when the grounds of the demand that we strike it are fairly sifted.

The differences in the style of the two Epistles ascribed to St. Peter early led to the second being regarded as, perhaps, not by the apostle. Thus Eusebius[1] tells us that, though not, in his day, fully accepted by the Churches as one of the sacred books, yet as "it appeared useful to many, it was studiously read with the other Scriptures."[2] Origen, also, is quoted by him as saying that there is some doubt of its being genuine, but he personally held it to be so, as he quotes it once and again in his Homilies. Hesitation in accepting an epistle as undoubtedly apostolic only shows, however, the jealous care of the early Christians to have the fullest proofs of its being so, before they admitted it, without question, into the Canon, and it is a great point in its favour, that so critical a mind as that of Origen was satisfied there were no grounds for disputing its sacred worth.[3] From his time, moreover, doubts respecting it gradually passed away, until, in the fourth century,[4] it received definite recognition as of inspired authority. Nor are there wanting signs of its having been known and quoted very soon after the apostolic age, for the latest and most acutely critical edition of the "Shepherd of Hermas"[5] notices no fewer than seven places which present parallels to the language of our

[1] *c.* A.D. 264–340. [2] *H. E.* iii. 3. [3] Origen, A.D. 185–253.
[4] A.D. 300–400. [5] *c.* A.D. 150.

Epistle more or less striking, though there are no direct quotations.[1] It appears, in fact, that the Epistle was in use among Christians in the middle of the second century, though the earliest Church teachers made no express references to it; that in the third century, the anxious fears of some still hesitated respecting it, not on historical but on internal grounds; but that, in the end, its genuineness had been fully recognised by the Church, and a place given it in the Canon, some time before A.D. 400.

This evidence from external sources may be hardly conclusive, but any argument such as that of the critics, from merely negative objections, must be very doubtful. It cannot be forgotten, for example, that the mention of Sargon, by Isaiah,[2] as a king of Assyria, was vigorously urged by the higher criticism, as an instance of the historical untrustworthiness of the prophet, since no mention was to be found of such a name, in any list of Assyrian kings that had come down to us. Yet, on the spade opening the mounds of Nineveh, it was discovered that Isaiah was right, and that Sargon had been one of the greatest Sultans of Assyria.

When, moreover, we turn to the internal evidence of the genuineness of our Epistle, little ground, indeed, is left, in my judgment, for hesitation in regarding it as no less canonical than the First Epistle, which all accept as by St. Peter. The language of the writer speaks, beforehand, against his being a mere literary forger, for he tells his readers that his faith in Christ is precious to him; he speaks as one who rejoices in the grace and peace obtained through Christ, and breathes, throughout, the loftiest spirituality and earnestness of aim. It may be said, how-

[1] *Pat. Apost. Op.* Gebhardt and Harnack.

[2] Isa. xx. 1.

ever, that the name of the apostle may have been assumed, as in some other cases, by a good man, to give authority to his words. But when we find the writer stating that he had been an eye-witness of the Transfiguration, and that "our Lord Jesus Christ had signified to him that the putting off of his tabernacle was near at hand;"[1] when, moreover, we find him speaking of St. Paul as a beloved brother and fellow-apostle,[2] it is surely impossible that any one could have ventured on such presumption and deception, and that the Epistle must, indeed, be written, as it claims to be, by "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ." Could one, who expressly repudiates "cunningly devised fables," have invented so audacious a fraud as to ascribe to the apostle the authorship of an Epistle with which he had nothing to do?

Criticism has further laid stress on the fact that it attaches great importance to "knowledge," while the First Epistle speaks rather of "hope," but surely this is of little weight. In the First, it is further urged, the coming of Christ is "near;" in the Second, it is "sudden;" but the one idea in no way excludes the other; and the Second, it is further said, dwells on "the end of the world," while the First is occupied with the return of Christ. But it is unnecessary to go more fully into details of which these are a fair sample. That the style of the two Epistles, and the points mentioned, are more or less different, is surely to be explained, without any straining, from the different thoughts of one mind specially occupied, at different times, by this or that subject; from the lapse of time, and from the different aim of the two Epistles; the object of the First being, to rouse the

[1] 2 Pet. i. 14, 16–18. [2] 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

Churches to withstand persecution, while that of the Second is rather to guard them from being led astray by growing heresy.

Stress has been laid on the correspondences between our Epistle and that of Jude,[1] as proof that the former must be of later origin than the lifetime of Peter; it being assumed that Jude was the earlier of the two documents. But proof is wholly wanting that Jude was written before our Epistle. It is held to be the simpler, but that does not show priority, since the copyist may have taken only what he chose from the fuller writing. The false teachers denounced are only, it is said, foretold in our Epistle, while they are already active in Jude. But that "destructive heresies," or, rather, "sects of perdition," [2] were yet to develop worse teaching than had already been known, was inevitable, though heresies enough had risen even in past years.

The opposing theories as to the date of the Epistle, where its authorship by St. Peter is rejected, show how much that is arbitrary and conjectural enters into the criticism of even the most learned and careful. To one, it seems to show proof of having been written at the beginning of the second century; to another, of dating from the middle of it; and to a third, from its close.[3] But the pastoral Epistles of St. Paul and the Apocalypse of St. John assure us, that the heretics whom our Epistle condemns had already appeared in just those years in which, shortly before the death of St. Peter, the Epistle must have been written. That they grew darker and

[1] Comp. Jude 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, with 2 Pet. ii. 1, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18; Jude 17, 18, with 2 Pet. iii. 2, 3.

[2] 2 Peter ii. 1.

[3] Huther, Mayerhoff, Schwegler.

more deadly as time passed, was only what must have happened. The work of Paul was closed, and it well became Peter to raise his warning voice, before he, also, had perished.

What those heresies, so widely spread in Asia Minor in the later apostolic age, were, is not easy to tell with any minute exactness, but their general features may be gathered from the various notices of them in the apostolic writings. The Judaising section of the Churches had at first confined itself to demanding that the Mosaic Law, as expanded indefinitely by the rabbis, should be regarded as essential to the saving efficacy of Christianity. But in an age so morally corrupt, amidst populations largely Eastern in their origin, mingled with representatives of every nation of the Mediterranean border, it was inevitable that the pure stream of the new faith should ere long catch a taint from flowing through such a soil. The extravagance of Oriental imagination, the sensuality of the lands of the Sun, the wild excesses of half-reclaimed barbarism in native races, the thousand speculations on nature, man, and the Unseen, which delighted an age in which the religions of past generations no longer satisfied the cravings of the mind or heart, created a state of things in which the clear light of Christianity was sadly clouded or turned aside. The Churches of Lesser Asia found themselves in contact with every form of sin, consecrated to the worship of the gods. Impurity had its headquarters in the temples of Venus. Nature worship, which was the prevalent religion, threw the reins on the neck of sensuality; every form of the black arts, astrology, spells, magic rites and formulas, incantations, necromancy, interpretation of dreams, the science

of omens, and much else, held the souls of the population at large in bondage to the most abject superstitions, and a prey to the vilest impostors from all lands. The disputatious loquacity of the Greek races was a constant element of disturbance in the Churches, as we see in that of Corinth—a characteristic marking them in after ages also. "Constantinople," says an unknown writer quoted by Gibbon,[1] "is full of mechanics and slaves, who all of them are profound theologians, and preach in the shops and in the streets. If you desire a man to change a piece of silver, he informs you wherein the Son differs from the Father; if you ask the price of a loaf, you are told, by way of reply, that the Son is inferior to the Father; and if you inquire whether the bath is ready, the answer is, that the Son was made out of nothing." Persian philosophy and theology filled the air with speculations respecting the Godhead, the origin of evil, the nature of spirits and their offices, ranks, and relation to the divine Essence, the inherent sinfulness of matter, and a thousand other metaphysical questions which easily led to debasing corruptions of Christian doctrine, and wild perversion of its whole character and spirit. The utter decay of faith in the religions of the past, the confounding of all local institutions by the political changes of Greek and Roman conquest, the unsettling of all minds except the most degraded, by the competition of countless new modes of thought, inevitable from the mingling of all nationalities in the great centres of commerce under the broad ægis of the Roman Peace, left the Christian communities open to the seductions of adventurers of every shade of current thought and morals

[1] Decline and Fall, v. 17.

No religious society can protect itself against the entrance of unworthy members, even in its earliest days. Temporary excitement may attract minds, perfectly sincere for the time, but with "no deepness of earth;" leaving them, when their passing enthusiasm has died away, with all the baser alloy of their nature unchanged. The twelve had an Iscariot among them, and the shadow of Pentecost fell on an Ananias and Sapphira in the Church at Jerusalem, and, a little later, many deliberately "false brethren" joined, through fanatical motives, or for ambition, or even worse ends.

That a religion like that of Christ should escape the utmost dangers from such causes, was not to be expected in an age, when the break-up of the very foundations of all ancient faiths, had filled the world with pretenders to new religions which should take the place of those which were passing away. One may easily imagine that the intrusion into Christianity of theological dreamers, fanatics, charlatans, and vicious impostors, from the Babel of creeds and systems of all races, may have led to the new faith becoming, undeservedly, a byword among its enemies for licentiousness, as we find it did, and to its being fancied by even such lofty minds as that of Tacitus, only "a hateful superstition," infamous for the "shameful and abominable crimes" of its adherents. Nor can we wonder at this, when we read the character of the heresies which soon manifested themselves, as painted by several of the apostles. Thus Paul speaks of false teachers in the Churches, displaying "the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders;"[1] of "seducing spirits," teaching "doctrines of demons, through the

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 9.

hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded, in their own conscience, as with a hot iron;"[1] of such agents of Satan being "men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith," and like the sorcerers of the Pharaohs, in old time.[2] In similar strains St. John and other apostles speak of "the synagogue of Satan," of "the false prophet," of "the Antichrists," "the spirits that were to be tried, whether they were of God," and of the morality of the doctrines taught being as hateful as the wickedness of Balaam or Jezebel.[3]

These deadly assaults on Christian doctrine differed greatly from the attacks of the Judaisers on the teaching of St. Paul, but they sprang from Jewish sources, and still bore the marks of their origin, in their pandering to Jewish prejudices, and their colouring by the baser extravagances and corruptions of Jewish superstition. Paul being dead, he was no longer the special object of hatred, but if the hostility to him and his school, for not accepting Judaism as essential, had comparatively died away, it was followed, on a narrower theatre, by much more dangerous outbreaks of malignity. Formerly raging from Palestine to Italy, the new anti-Christian crusade was mainly confined to the half-eastern, half-western regions of Proconsular Asia, Ephesus being its head-quarters, as befitted the seat of Diana-worship and centre of all forms of debased superstition. Paul, indeed, had foreseen that it would be so, and had cautioned the Ephesian Christians against the "grievous wolves" who would enter among them,[4] and Peter and Jude had

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2. [2] 2 Tim. iii. 8, 9.
[3] Rev. ii. 9, 13; xvi. 13; xix. 20; xx. 10; 2 Pet. ii. 1; 1 John iv. 1; 2 Pet. ii. 15; Rev. ii. 14, 20; Jude 11. [4] Acts xx. 29.

addressed their Epistles, warning against these foes of the truth, to the Churches of Asia Minor.

That the disturbers of these Churches were Jews, is evident, from St. Paul telling us that they laid stress on circumcision,[1] and desired to be teachers of the law,[2] and also from their enforcing on their adherents scrupulous attention to "meat and drink, holy days, new moons and sabbaths," and their teaching "Jewish fables and commandments of men.[3] But with these they had mingled many Oriental elements, such as the emanation of all spiritual essences, of whatever dignity, from that of God, worshipping angels, dwelling in idle speculation in the things man has not seen, discoursing about "myths and endless genealogies," that is, ranks and subordinations of spiritual beings, and so adopting the Eastern doctrine of the inherent malignity of matter, as to forbid their followers to marry, and urging an unhealthy mortification of the body, with many other "profane and vain babblings and oppositions to the truth of the 'Gnosis,' or 'knowledge,' that is falsely so called."[4] Many of these speculative vagaries were, indeed, gradually incorporated in Jewish theology, and are now to be found in the Talmud. Gnostic "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men" had, in truth, deeply infected the Jews, themselves Orientals. The worship of angels, moreover, was already much in favour in Phrygia, as we see from St. Paul warning the Colossians against it, and it was still so strong, more than three centuries

[1] Col. ii. 11–14. [2] 1 Tim. i. 7.

[3] Col. ii. 16; Gal. iv. 10; Rom. xiv. 3; Titus i. 14.

[4] Col. i. 16; ii. 8, 11–14, 18, 20, 21, 23; 1 Tim. iv. 1–3, 7; vi. 20, i. 7–20; 2 Tim. ii. 18.

later, as to be condemned by the Council of Laodicea as idolatrous.[1]

Nor can it be doubted that the restless hatred of the Jew towards the Gentile, and his dream of a world-overturning Messianic revolution in his favour, spread the spirit of political agitation, no less than of wild theological speculation through the Churches, everywhere containing, as they did, a proportion of Jewish converts from even the extreme zealots of their faith, who inflamed and led astray the minds of too many of their heathen-born fellow-Christians. The constant exhortations to submissive loyalty which mark the Epistles imply a danger of the want of it.[2] The grosser teaching of some, in those days when every one who chose spoke in the Christian meetings, and when even the women essayed to do so, would find a ready soil in the frightful immorality of the times, and makes it possible to understand the warnings against the worst sins and crimes, which are pressed, again and again, on the Churches, by the apostles.[3]

This anarchic and licentious spirit, though prevalent everywhere, showed itself in its worst excess in the Churches of Lesser Asia. Before St. Paul had closed his labours, its lowering cloud, as we have seen, had called forth his warnings to the elders of Ephesus,[4] and in his letters to Titus and Timothy.[5] Along with Oriental doctrines of "severity to the body,"[6] there was found the contempt of all morality, on the ground that, as

[1] Ramsay's "Church in the Roman Empire," 477.

[2] Rom. xiii. 1–8; Tit. iii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13, 17.

[3] 1 Thess. iv. 1–8; 1 Cor. v. vi.; 2 Cor. vi. 11–18; Rom. xiii. 13, 14; Gal. v. 19.

[4] Acts xx. 29.

[5] Tit. i. 14–17; iii. 1 ff; 2 Tim. i. 15; ii. 16 ff; iii. 1–8, 13; iv. 3, 4.

[6] Col. ii. 23.

Christians, the Law had nothing more to do with them, while as heirs of the Messianic kingdom, presently to be set up at the coming of our Lord, they owed no obedience to existing authorities. It is extraordinary to read the forebodings, or even realised experiences, of the apostles. "In the last days," so very close at hand, in his opinion, men, St. Paul foretold, would be found among the brethren "lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof;"[1] "men to whom nothing was pure, both their mind and conscience being defiled; who professed to know God, but denied Him by their works, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate."[2] St. Peter paints the dangers of the Churches he addresses in equally strong colours,[3] while both by him and St. Jude the state of things is compared to that before the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the false teachers and their followers are warned that their "destruction slumbereth not." He who "did not spare even angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," they are told, was assuredly certain to carry out His vengeance on these transgressors. "They walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement, and despise dominion. Daring and self-willed, they tremble not to rail at dignities. They turn the love feasts of the Church into noisy drinking scenes, their eyes are full of adultery, they are children

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 2 ff. [2] Tit. i. 15, 16. [3] 1 Pet. ii. 11–17; iv. 15.

of cursing: uttering great swelling words of vanity; they entice to the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those just escaping from lives of error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are the slaves of corruption."[1] Yet they had "known the way of righteousness, but were like swine which, after washing, had again wallowed in the mire." In Jude all this terrible indictment is repeated, so that the Churches of the later apostolic years, especially in Asia Minor, must have been poor illustrations of Christianity. Yet we must not think that the work of St. Paul and his helpers had totally perished. Beneath the scum thrown up by the violent agitations of the times, the pure wine lay clear, and one may hope, abundant below.

To congregations thus almost unimaginably unlike what we might have fancied, the Second Epistle of St. Peter was addressed, as the First had been. It runs as follows:—

The Second Epistle General of Peter.

I. 1. Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like-precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: 2. Grace to you and peace be multiplied, in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord; 3. seeing that His divine power has granted us all things that minister to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue; 4. by which He has granted us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5. Yea, and for this very cause, adding on your part all diligence, in your faith—as its fruit,

[1] 2 Pet. ii. 1 ff.

supply, besides, virtue—not failing in manliness and true vigour of worthy life, the root of all other graces; and, in your virtue, knowledge, to use those graces wisely; 6. and in your knowledge, self-control, to withstand temptations; and in your self-control, enduring patience under all injuries and hardships; and in your patience, godliness; 7. and in your godliness, love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren, love towards all. 8. For if these things are yours, and keep growing, they make you to be not slothful or unfruitful as regards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. For he that lacketh these things is blind, his closed eyes seeing only dimly and near at hand; he having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins of his former life. 10. Wherefore, brethren, since there is this danger of forgetfulness, and since these graces are so vital, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye follow these counsels, ye shall never stumble; 11. for, thus acting, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shall be richly supplied to you.

There is indeed a sure ground for confidence that this glorious reward awaits the being faithful to death.

12. Therefore, because entrance into the kingdom of Christ in heaven, is assured to those only who, by the strenuous cultivation of all Christian virtues, advance continually to an even fuller knowledge of Him, I shall set myself always, as opportunity offers to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them already, and are established in the truth which is with you 13. And indeed I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance of them; 14. knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle will come on me soon, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to me. 15. But I will take diligent care that at every time ye may be able after my decease to call these truths which I have just told you, to remembrance. 16. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when

we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. 17. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; 18. and this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven, when we were with Him in the holy mount. 19. And thus we have the word of Old Testament prophecy made more sure; to which ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. 20. Keeping in mind, before all things, that no prophecy of Scripture is to be interpreted by mere private, human insight, unaided from above. 21. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost, and, therefore, He alone can disclose its time or manner of fulfilment.

The perversion of prophecy to misleading ends, as implied in this sharp rebuke of private boldness in interpreting it, was then, as it has been always, a passion among religious charlatans, specially fascinating and misleading to the weak-minded. To seek to know the future was, indeed, a supreme characteristic of antiquity, to profit by which diviners, soothsayers, professors of magic rites, and numberless impostors of all religions abounded; the audacity of Jewish pretenders, who had lent themselves to the fashion of the day, for gain, ambition, the madness of fanatical excitement, or dark political ends, being pre-eminently foremost. Jewish Apocalyptic books were circulated on every hand. The "Second book of Esdras" which deals with the immediate future, dates from about the time of this epistle. The "Book of Jubilees" is also a production of about this date; a book which treats the

sacred narrative of the Old Testament with the freedom of later Judaism, and is so intense in its fanaticism for the Law, that it tells us it was observed by the angels in heaven, long before being revealed to man; that it was first written on heavenly tablets, and was only long after, piece by piece, made known to the Jews. Many doctrines however, it affirms, remained unrevealed except to the patriarchs, who received them from God, written in secret books, which had, from them, come down to the rabbis. Sacrifices, and first-fruits, the yearly Jewish feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, we are assured, were all zealously observed by Abraham and his successors. Speculative doctrines teaching that the soul lives on, without any bodily resurrection, and giving extended knowledge respecting the angels, link this composition with heresies of which we hear from the Epistles. The "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," another of the books of this period, is, as we have it, a succession of revelations and prophecies, mainly of strong Jewish colouring but mingled with Christian elements, and with exhortations designed to strengthen and comfort the faithful; but it is essentially like the others, and, with them, is only a sample of a literature spread widely in those days through the churches. In such a time of pretended communications from heaven, and of affected knowledge of everything within the veil—the details of the life of heaven, its occupations, hierarchies, and relations to mankind, present and future — it was of the utmost importance to warn the excitable population of Asia Minor, and thus turn them, if possible, from leaders who would draw them into all kinds of wild speculations, and even into degrading alliances of religion and immo-

rality. To this object, therefore, St. Peter now addresses himself.

II. 1. But, in old times, there arose amidst these inspired men, false prophets among the people, Israel, and so, among you, also, there shall be false teachers, who shall stealthily bring in heresies fatal to the soul, denying even the Lord[1] that bought them; thus bringing on themselves swift destruction. 2. And many shall follow their lascivious doings;[2] by reason of whom the Way of the Truth shall be evil spoken of. 3. And for covetousness, they shall with feigned words make trade of you, for your money; whose judgment, long pronounced, does not delay, and their destruction does not sleep. 4. For how shall they escape if God spared not *angels* when they sinned,[3] but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5. and spared not the old world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6. and laying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha in ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those that, after, should live ungodly; 7. and delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked. 8. For that righteous man, dwelling among them, distressed his righteous soul from day to day, seeing and hearing their lawless deeds. 9. Let me now show you that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment; 10. but chiefly them that walk after the flesh, in their lust after uncleanness, and despise dominion, whether of heaven, or of man. Daring, self-willed, they tremble not to rail at preachers of righteousness and even angelic dignities, as the generation of Noah, of which I have spoken, railed at his righteous warnings, and as the people of Sodom and Gomorrha railed at the angels of the Lord, sent to them:[4] 11. whereas even angels, as for

[1] Lit., Master. [2] Jude 4. [3] Jude 6 ff. [4] Gen. xix. 1 ff.

instance Michael,[1] though so much greater in might and power, bring not a railing judgment against them, that is, against dignities, before the Lord, as when Michael would not bring one, thus, even against the devil, when disputing with him about the body of Moses.[2] 12. But these false teachers, as creatures without reason, born mere animals, to be taken and destroyed, railing at things of which they know nothing, shall in their corruption, themselves, assuredly perish, 13. suffering evil as the penalty of evil doing. For they are men who think it delight to have drunken feasts in the day time, men who, instead of being faithful teachers, are stains and blemishes in the churches, turning their share in the love-feasts into drunken carousings, while they affect to feast with you;[3] 14. having eyes full of adultery, and insatiable in sin; beguiling unstable souls; having hearts practised in covetousness, men who are children of the curse.[4] 15. Forsaking the right way they have gone astray, and have followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor,[5] who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16. but was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb ass speaking with a human voice, and staying the madness of the prophet. 17. These men are springs without water, and clouds driven by a stormwind, and thus giving no rain; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved.[6] 18. For, uttering swelling clouds of empty words, they allure to the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them who live in error; 19. promising them true liberty, while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for a man is the slave of him by whom he is overcome. 20. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last condition is become worse with them than the first. 21. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of

[1] Jude 9. [2] Jude 9. [3] Jude 12.
[4] Eph. ii. 3; 2 Thess. ii. 3. [5] Jude 11. [6] Jude 12.

righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "The dog turns back to his own vomit again," and "The sow that had washed, to wallow again in the mire."

Renewed exposure of the false teachers.

III. 1. This is, now, beloved, the second epistle I write you; in both of which I stir up your sincere, uncorrupted, honest mind to watchfulness by putting you in remembrance of what I have already told you; 2. that ye may recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and also the commandment of the Lord and Saviour, through your apostles;[1] 3. not forgetting as your first remembrance, having been told that in the last days,—those in which we live—scoffers shall come mocking, walking after their own ungodly lusts, 4. and saying, Where is the fulfilment of the promise of His coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, to whom the promise was given, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 5. For this they wilfully forget, that so far from all things continuing unchanged since creation, there were heavens from of old, and an earth formed out of water and amidst water, by the word of God, 6. by which means also,—God's word—the world that then was, being overwhelmed with water, perished: 7. but the heavens and earth that are now, have been preserved by the same word of God, for fire; being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8. But do not forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, so that the delay in the fulfilment of the promise, since the times of the fathers, need not disturb you, and a thousand years as one day, so that the complete fulfilment of what is to begin at Christ's Return, may take indefinite generations to carry wholly out. 9. The

[1] Jude 17.

seeming delay is, indeed, through God's goodness, for the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some think, who count the delay slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief, with sudden unexpectedness; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise of the last conflagration, and the elements of nature shall be dissolved with fervent heat; and the earth and the works of the Almighty that are therein—in the heavens and in the elements of nature—shall be burned up.[1] 11. All these things, then, the whole visible universe, being thus to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, 12. looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with the angels of His power, in flaming fire,[2] by reason of which the heavens, being set on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements[3] of nature shall melt with fervent heat? 13. But we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

14. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things,—the coming of Christ and the renewing of creation—give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight. 15. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you;[4] 16. as also in all his epistles,[5] speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unsteadfast, led by the false teachers, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

[1] 2 Thess. i. 7. [2] 2 Thess. i. 7. [3] "Elements" = "component parts."

[4] Most probably a reference to the Epistle to the Ephesians, which was a circular letter to the churches of Lesser Asia, to which St. Peter was now writing.

[5] Reference has been fancied by one or other, to Rom. ix. 22; ii. 4; 1 Cor. i. 7–9; Heb. ix. 26 ff.; x. 25, 37, and also both Epistles to the Thessalonians.

17. Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. 18. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen

The story of Christianity had, from the first, been written in tears and blood. Its Founder had been put to a violent death as a criminal, in the early flower of His manhood, after so painful a life that He could speak of the birds of the air having nests, and the foxes holes, while He had not where to lay His head. His apostles and followers, from the beginning, had to tread the blackened and scorched path of mockings, and scourgings, and bonds, and imprisonments, ending often in martyrdom, and this bitter experience grew even more common as time passed. Nor had they the consolation of feeling that, if the storm raged everywhere around, there was still, in the bosom of the Church itself, the internal unity and love which offered a heavenly contrast. Within a very short time after Christ's death, as we have seen, fierce controversy had broken out between the more extreme Jewish-born brethren and the converts from heathenism, convulsing all the missionary centres of Syria, Asia Minor, and other lands with fierce party strife, which must have more or less paralysed the new movement, while discrediting it among the general population it had sought to win.

But all these, however distressing to the apostles and their colleagues, were almost slight troubles when compared with those of the later years of this first generation. St. Paul could comfort himself, in these earlier trials,

with the thought that "in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached,"[1] but as he drew near his end, things grew ever more gloomy. Heresies of all kinds sprang up, especially in the churches of Asia Minor; sapping, at once, the fundamental doctrines of the faith and the elementary principles of morality. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus describe a state of things which must have wrung his very soul. The gold had become dim; the most fine gold had changed. "The man of sin, the son of perdition," had appeared in the churches, and was undoing all the hard-won results of the apostle's life-long self-sacrifice for Christ. A little later, St. Peter, as we have seen, had to bewail the same degeneracy in too many, and to warn those still faithful against even darker times at hand. The sun, and the moon, and the stars, were already well-nigh darkened, but ever deeper clouds would return after the rain. The words of Christ were being fulfilled, for "many false prophets had arisen, and had led many astray, and iniquity was so multiplied that the love of the many had waxed cold,"[2] and "all these things were but the beginning of sorrows."[3] It is no wonder, then, to find the short Epistle of St. Jude,—written, like all the remaining books of the New Testament, except the Epistles of John, before the fall of Jerusalem,—equally gloomy in its tone. The Holy City perished in the autumn of the year 70, and it was now at least A.D. 66; the middle of a decade which had already given us the letters of St. Paul to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, Timothy, and Titus, with both the Epistles of St. Peter, which were written by the apostle after

[1] Phil. i. 18. [2] Matt. xxiv. 11, 12. [3] Matt. xxiv. 8.

Paul's death. "Hebrews," also, dates from these fruitful ten years, and the Epistle of Jude—a companion picture to the Second Epistle of Peter.

Jude, the writer of this short contribution to the Canon, calls himself simply, "a servant" (or, rather, slave) "of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James;" not claiming to be an apostle, but separating himself from the Twelve by reminding his readers of "the words which have been spoken before, by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[1] There was a Judas Lebbæus among the apostles, but we do not know of his having any brother. On the other hand, James, the brother of our Lord, who was, as we know the head of the church of Jerusalem, had, even earlier, been recognised as one of its pillars,[2] and is stated in the Gospels[3] to have had a brother, Jude, or Judas. That he and Jude, if brothers,—speak of themselves only as the "servants of Christ," not as His brothers, may be regarded as a reverend shrinking from putting themselves, even so far, on an equality with Him. The comparatively unknown Judas could not, indeed, have introduced himself more effectively to the churches, if the relation to Jesus Himself was too great an honour to mention, than by letting them know that he was the brother of the greatly revered and universally known James, whose martyrdom, very recently, at Jerusalem, had sent a shock of indignation and sorrow through the Christian congregations in all lands. That the two were really brothers is curiously made more probable by the fact that, from whatever cause, there are striking similarities in the epistles of the two, for both differ from those of St. Paul, in having no personal greetings or

[1] Jude 17. [2] Gal. ii. 9. [3] Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3.

references, and in not being addressed to any local circle of believers. But while the Epistle of James is written only to the Jewish Christians outside Palestine, that of Jude is virtually inscribed to all "them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ,"[1] and therefore, to all Christians, whether Jewish or heathen born, in Palestine or beyond its limits.

His great aim is to rouse the churches everywhere, to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints,"[2] so that its contents are in no way modified to suit the case of any one locality. But, that such an epistle could be written for the warning of the whole Christendom of the day, implies a spread of moral and doctrinal degeneracy that is painful even to us, and must have been overpowering to the faithful of the first age. Men had everywhere crept in privily, who abused the teaching of Paul as to Christian liberty, using it as a cloak to licentiousness, or, to use Jude's words, "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness,"[3] while by their "dreamings"[4] in wild Eastern philosophy and theology, they not only "defiled the flesh," but "denied" the sole "dominion" of "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ;" their audacious speculations and systems intruding many orders of angels, in successive grades, between Him and man. These pestilent teachings, it seems, broke out in Jerusalem after the death of St. James,[5] and were the corrupting germ which, at a later time, developed into the many-branched heresies known collectively as Gnosticism. Tendencies towards such a state of things are, indeed, met in the Epistle to the Colossians, and in the

[1] Jude 1. [2] Jude 3. [3] Jude 4.
[4] Jude 8. [5] Euseb. "Church Hist." iv. 22.

false teachers of the Pastoral Epistles, and in the Church at Corinth, showing that the moral decay so earnestly condemned by St. Jude had for years been spreading. At Corinth, in fact, the abuses that grieved St. Paul, were in many points identical with those that troubled St. Jude. Perverting the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles—that "all things were lawful,"[1] many outraged all Jewish-Christian principles, and even those of common morality, by falling back into heathen customs and ways of thought; eating the flesh of heathen sacrifices, knowing it to be so, and taking part in the idol banquets on it, in the heathen temple-grounds; turning the Christian love-feasts into carousals and gormandisings like those of heathen "idol-clubs," and refining away the doctrine of the resurrection into no more than a new spiritual birth.

The Epistle of Jude, like the Second Epistle of St. Peter, was received into the Canon, only after having been for a length of time the subject of discussion; but there is no reason to challenge its genuineness. A quotation in it from a section of the apocryphal book of Enoch, as old as the time of the Maccabees, was urged against its being ranked as canonical; an evident reference to another apocryphal book, the Assumption of Moses, written about ten years after the Crucifixion, adding to the hesitation to receive it. But Paul himself introduces an unhistorical tradition of the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres, and uses allegories similar to those in vogue with the rabbis, such as that of Sinai and Jerusalem being represented by Hagar and Sarah; so that analogous peculiarities in Jude in no measure militate against his epistle.

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 12; x. 23.

The exact date of composition and the place of origin of our epistle are not known, but it must have been written before the fall of Jerusalem, as there is no allusion to that supreme event, though it would have been an irresistible illustration of the judgments of God, in proof of which the long past fate of the Cities of the Plain is brought forward.

Of the life of Jude nothing is known, beyond his having resembled James and the rest of the family of Nazareth, in standing aloof from Jesus until after the Crucifixion, though from that time a fervent believer. That he must have enjoyed high honour among the churches is, however, evident from the fact, that he felt warranted to send out an encyclical like his epistle, to the whole of the then existing Christendom. To have done so, he must have been well known everywhere, and recognised as entitled to address his fellow-believers with authority, if only as the brother of our Lord, though he may also have held the presidency of the Church at Jerusalem, and thus been head of the Mother Church, to which all looked with reverence. Eusebius quotes from Hegesippus, a historian living under Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, whose reigns extended from A.D. 117 to A.D. 180, a tradition that grandchildren of Jude were alive in the reign of Domitian A.D. 81 to A.D. 96—and that being reputed descendants of David, they were brought before the emperor, as possible claimants of the throne of Judæa. Having at once admitted that they were really of the race of David, they were then asked how much money or property they owned, and replied that, between them, they had the value of about 9000 denarii, in all, say, £300—but this in

the shape of thirty-nine acres of land from which they raised their taxes, and on which they supported themselves by their own labour. To prove this they showed their hands, which were hard and rough with toil. "The kingdom of Christ the brother of their grandfather," they said, "was not an earthly one, but a heavenly, and would appear at the end of the world, when He would come in glory, and judge the quick and the dead, giving to every one according to his works." Domitian hearing such a story, would not, we are told, condescend to notice them further, but dismissed them as harmless simpletons. On their return, however, to Palestine, they were hailed as confessors, and, as such, and from their relation to Christ, were set over little churches near their home, living on to the times of Trajan—A.D. 98 to A.D. 117.[1]

The venerable relic of antiquity thus preserved for us in the Canon runs as follows; every line of it clouded by the gloom of the dark sky under which it was written.

The General Epistle of Jude.

1. Jude, a bondservant, slave, of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are called of God, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: 2. Mercy unto you, and peace and love be multiplied.

Occasion of writing.

3. Beloved, having it much at heart to write you respecting our common salvation, I felt especially constrained to do so, to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all, delivered to the saints. 4. For certain men have stealthily crept into the churches, who were written

[1] Euseb. "Church Hist." iii. 20.

down of old, in the book of God,[1] to that condemnation which I will presently make known; ungodly men, perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Three examples of the judgments with which the godless men of whom he has spoken will be visited.

5. Now I would recall to your mind, though ye know all such things if only once mentioned, how the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, after this, as He who by no means clears the guilty, destroyed those of them that believed not. 6. And, how, those angels who kept not to their own assigned principality, but forsaking it, left their proper place of abode and came down to this world, to take wives of the daughters of men,[2] He, God, has kept in everlasting chains,[3] covered with darkness,[4] unto the judgment of the great day. In this, indeed, He acted, 7. even, to give a third case, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, which having, in like manner with these, given themselves over to fornication, and gone, as Israel in the wilderness and as the angels had done, after strange flesh, are set forth as an example; suffering the punishment of eternal fire. 8. Yet, in spite of these warning examples, these ungodly men, the false teachers, in their dreamings, defile the flesh, in the same way as Sodom and Gomorrah did, belittle the divine Majesty, in which all might and dominion have their source, and blaspheme the hierarchy of angelic dignities.

These words appear to refer to the first signs of what afterwards expanded to the full-blown "dreamings" of Gnosticism. Heathenism, philosophy, Oriental speculation.

[1] Heb. xii. 23.

[2] Gen. vi. 2, as expanded in the Jewish apocryphal Book of Enoch, cap. xii. 4. [3] Jewish Haggada. [4] Enoch x. 5; lxii. 10.

and Jewish mysticism as developed by the rabbis, were, alike, accustomed to think of an infinite series of higher or subordinate orders of beings, variously known in the different systems, as angels, deities, "demons," æons, or emanations issuing from the fountain of the Essential Godhead. In this long descending chain of powers, the first place was assigned, in rabbinical philosophy, to the Logos or Memra—the Word, or the Hochma, that is, the Wisdom, of Jehovah, which, being personified, was regarded as the highest of these celestial emanations, and, in this sense, was applied by these innovators to "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ," of whose divine rank, however, it was a virtual denial, making him, as the Christ, only a phantom.[1] Nor was this all, for these false teachers bore themselves, in respect to the hierarchy of heaven, as the Archangel Michael himself would not make bold to do even against the devil—a fallen, not a sinless angel.

9. But even Michael the archangel, when, contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against even him a railing, defamatory condemnation, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee." 10. But these men rail at, and speak evil of things of which they know nothing; things which, like the beasts without reason, they do not understand with spiritually illuminated minds, but only in a natural way, with the faculties we have in common with beasts, and hence, in these wild doings, they destroy themselves; sinking into a still worse state.

Origen[2] says that Jude quotes this about Michael from a Jewish writing known in his time, "The Assumption of Moses."

[1] Jude 4. [2] *Peri Archōn.* iii. 2.

11. Woe to them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, the symbol, among Jews, of rebellion against God, and have run eagerly into the wickedness of Balaam, going against God, like him for hire, and they have as it were, already perished like the offenders in the rebellion of Korah.[1] 12. These are they who are, in your love-feasts, like hidden shipwrecking rocks in the sea, for they wreck those meals, turning them into a scandal; shamelessly feasting and drinking together, and, without fear of God feeding only themselves, and leaving the poor unfed; they are clouds without water,—mere mockeries of what they pretend to be; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, by having no fruit, and by being doomed to be plucked up by the roots; 13 wild sea-waves, casting out over themselves their own shame, like foam; wandering comet-stars, for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved for ever.

Their appearing was foretold by Enoch, the seventh from Adam.

14. But of these, Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, in the words—"Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His holy ones," the angels.[2] 15 to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

In the Book of Enoch,[3] the words occur which Jude quotes,—"And see He comes with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon them, and He will destroy the godless, and reckon with all flesh, for all that sinners and the godless have plotted or done against Him." Enoch is, further, called in this book, "The seventh from Adam."[4] A fuller description of the false teachers,

[1] Num xxxi. 16.; xvi.
[2] Heb. xii. 22; Rev. v. 11, 2 Thess. i. 7.
[3] Enoch i. 9.
[4] Enoch lx. 8; xciii. 3.

rising naturally from the last words of the prophecy just quoted, follows.

16. These men are sullen murmurers, **like Korah**, discontented, **even while** walking after their lusts, and their mouth speaks great swelling **words of pride**, while they show honour to individuals, for the sake of advantage **from them**.

17. But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18. how that they said to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts."[1] 19. These are they who create divisions; **not spiritual men, but** natural, not having the **Holy** Spirit. 20. But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21. keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22. And on some have compassion, who are in doubt; 23. and some, save, snatching them out of the fire; having mercy on **still** others, with fear, **on their account and on your own**: hating even the under-garment tainted by the flesh. **Thus, while preserving your own faith, pity and win back those in doubt, through the false teachers,—eagerly pluck back those already**, as it were, in the fire, **and pity others, yet with anxious fear lest you yourselves be tempted and polluted; hating even the approach to sin, as you would an inner garment that touched a leprous body**.

24. Now unto Him, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory, without blemish, in exceeding joy; 25 to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, **as it was** before all time, is now, and shall be evermore. Amen.

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 1 f.; iv. 3; 1 Tim. iv. 1; Acts xx. 29. The words given are not an express quotation of any text, but present the spirit of many

CHAPTER III

IN JUDÆA. THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

No one would suppose that anything but public quiet, and the orderly movement of affairs, marked the daily life of Judæa, while the short encyclical of St. Jude, sent out, we may believe, from Jerusalem, was being carried by poor Jews or other wanderers, painfully toiling to all lands after employment or petty commerce, or returning from religious pilgrimage, to their sordid homes, giving copies of it to the small societies of Christians in the Jewish quarters, the slave huts, the slums, or back streets or lanes, in every city, town, or village on their way. It would appear, from the Epistle, that the danger of believers being seduced by false teachers was the only matter then agitating mankind, for there is no hint of any world outside the walls in which the Christians anywhere assembled; just as the monkish chronicles of our Middle Ages, in the wildest times write placidly, of their cloister history only, as if there were nothing else to record.

Yet in those days things were coming fast to a crisis in Palestine, while in Rome, Nero was filling up the measure of his insane wickedness, and was soon to close the great line of the Cæsars by an ignominious death, amidst the execration of the best of mankind. It shows the spirit of the times, however, that he had been allowed to reign four years after the burning of the city in A.D. 64, in

spite of all the public vice and ferocious despotism that followed, and that no small number of his subjects not only lamented him when he fell, but hoped for his return; not believing him really dead. Conspiracy had often plotted his destruction during those years, but only to the ruin of those concerned in it. In A.D. 66, indeed, there was even a last flicker of glory for dying Cæsarism; Corbulo, the Consul commanding in the East, having driven the Parthians out of Armenia, and having sent their king to Rome, to do homage to Nero. The crimes of the emperor—his matricide, his murder of his wife, the burning of Rome, the putting to death, like cattle, of men of the highest rank and character—were all forgotten, in the momentary revival of popularity from this far-off victory. Yet within three years after the theatrical spectacle of the public submission of the Parthian king, at Puteoli, had put all Rome in ecstasies, and Nero, greeted as Imperator, had come down from the Capitol wearing the laurel crown of a conqueror, and shut the temple of Janus, as a sign of now universal peace, open war had begun between the Jews and the Romans in Palestine. But so far from damping the public joy, this news of approaching trouble increased it, for no war was ever more popular in Rome than one against the abhorred Jews.[1] In the last month of 66, Nero, still thinking himself the idol of the people, set off to Greece, to carry out a long-cherished wish, to display there his vocal and musical genius at the Greek games. Vespasian was sent to Palestine, and Corbulo, guilty of having been too successful, was forced to kill himself, while Nero was on this progress; nor did he return to Italy till the beginning

[1] Suet. *Nero.* 13; Tac. *Hist.* v. i. 10.

of 68, when he could no longer ignore the warnings of his council, that danger was threatening in Gaul. Yet, so little did he realise his position, that he rode from Naples to Rome as victor in the Olympic games, in the gilded chariot in which Augustus had ridden in his triumph over Antony and Cleopatra, drawn, as then, by white horses; the journey ending by his hanging up over 1800 victors' crowns he had received, on the obelisk in the Circus Maximus.

An insurrection of the excitable Gauls had widened into a movement in which Galba, who commanded in the greater part of Spain, was compromised, and forced to declare himself against Nero, as the one chance of saving his life. Otho, at this time governor of Lusitania, which comprised much of the rest of the peninsula, had been formerly the husband of Poppæa, whom Nero had forcibly taken from him and married; only, however, in the end, to kill her by a kick when she could ill bear it. Galba's defection, and his being joined by Otho, at once plunged the emperor in despair. His ruin, he saw, was at hand. Tigellinus, the Chief of the Prætorian troops, infamous for his pandering to his master's enormities, presently fled. Nero did not know what to do, and was too irresolute for any vigorous action. Meanly cowed, he even thought that perhaps, if he went to Gaul, and wept before the revolted soldiery, it would win them back again. He would entertain them afterwards, and would play, and sing his Olympic triumphs to them! Soon after, he proposed to flee to Egypt. Meanwhile, insulting words appeared on walls and pillars. The people were turning to the rising sun. Giving out that he had gone to Egypt, the troops took the opportunity to declare for Galba, who had now been recognised by the

Senate. Next morning Nero found himself deserted in his villa. The Prætorian cohort had been withdrawn in the night, and the greater number of his slaves and freedmen had run away. One, who remained, urged his fleeing with him, to a little property he had in the country, about four miles from Rome. A scribe, and two lads, the instruments of the fallen man's vice, were the whole following left him, and with these he hurried, in a single waggon, to the place of refuge. So low had he sunk who yesterday had been the ruler of the world! In his terror he covered his face as he was driven on, and finally left the waggon, to make his way, through reeds and swamp, to Phaon's house. Meanwhile, the Senate had sat in judgment on him, and had condemned him to be scourged to death. The doomed man knew that he must die, but waited till he heard the horses of those who were to arrest him, near at hand, before he could plunge his dagger into his throat, and even then, his attendant had, in pity, to seize his trembling hand, and drive the weapon home. The Roman aristocracy had, at last, their revenge, but the lower classes, whom the crimes of the dead man had not affected, at least directly, were troubled, mainly, by wondering whether his successor would feed them, and amuse them as lavishly. In the provinces, the emperor's madness had wrought comparatively little evil.

In Judæa, things had been going from bad to worse during the last years of the monster's reign. The peace secured by Corbulo with Parthia, had left no motive to Rome for treating with any tenderness the troublesome Jewish province. It seemed, indeed, to Josephus, the design of the last procurators to excite an open insurrection, that resistance might, once for all, be drowned in

blood, and Tacitus calmly tells us that patience lasted till Gessius Florus became procurator.[1] Rome was tired of lawless agitation, and wished open war rather than the guerrilla-fighting, which wearied out whole legions, and kept the entire East disturbed. From the time of Albinus, in A.D. 62, the fundamental idea of Roman policy in Judæa appeared to be systematic ill-treatment of the richer classes, who were the friends of peace, and impunity to the bandits who held the country in terror. A brief attempt to curb the robber domination by wholesale executions having failed, a tacit understanding seemed to have been come to, with the bands who lurked in the hills. Even the marauders caught and sent to head-quarters by the local officers, were set free for so much ransom, and an open exchange of prisoners on both sides was carried on. A change of procurators brought no improvement, and indeed, Gessius Florus, who entered on office in 66, made things even worse; he being only, to use the expression of Josephus, a hangman instead of a robber.[2] What Albinus had done secretly, he did openly, nor had he any fear of Rome, since his wife was a friend of the empress, Poppæa.[3] Tired of the sputtering, petty warfare round him, he fanned the insurrection, that he might induce all the raiders to unite, and then crush them with one blow. "Where pity was deserved," says Josephus, "he was most barbarous, and in disgraceful things most shameless. In disguising the truth and inventing subtle modes of deceit, he was without a rival. Thinking it too small a matter to plunder individuals, he spoiled whole towns, and ruined entire communities at a stroke, even letting it be all but publicly proclaimed, that any one

[1] Tac. *Hist.* v. 10. [2] *Bell. Jud.* ii. 2. [3] *Ant.* xx. 11, 1

might turn robber if he shared his spoil with the governor. Whole villages were left desolate; the inhabitants fleeing to quieter parts." It was hopeless to send complaints against him to the proconsul, Cestius Gallus, at Antioch, for the two hung together, but Cestius, having come to Jerusalem at the Passover of A.D. 66, it seemed possible he might then listen to the grievances of the nation. Multitudes pressed round him, clamouring against Florus, but the accused procurator only mocked at their outcries, and Cestius himself presently added a new trouble worse than all they had borne. The rebuilding of Rome by Nero required immense sums of money, and to raise these, a new census was to be taken throughout the provinces. That made under Quirinus many years before, had been the beginning of the strife between the Jews and Rome; for Orientals abhor any "numbering" of a population, since it involves the disclosure of their worldly belongings, and inevitably brings after it increased taxation. To the Jew, especially, the story of David's bringing down the wrath of Jehovah on the nation by attempting to number them, had made the very thought of doing so, in the last degree alarming. Yet, now, the priests were ordered to send in a return of those present at the Passover; reckoning, however, only ten persons for each lamb slain, though even twenty were often sharers of a single victim. But the inflammable state of things made it impossible to do more than get an estimate from the high-priests, that 3,000,000 were present at the feast: no public numeration being practicable.[1] The great man's visit over, Florus was left to his own evil ways, Josephus, indeed, asserting that he

[1] "Jewish War," ii. 14, 3.

deliberately forced the Jews into rebellion; war being the only means by which he could conceal his misdoings. The unspeakable crimes of Verres, so mercilessly exposed by Cicero, were virtually re-enacted. But it was not easy to drive the people to the final rupture, for their sufferings by plunderers and officials in the past, the depopulation of districts, the emigration of large numbers, and the wide-spread misery of the general population, had created a dread of open war, which would be so immeasurably worse in its inflictions. Through the country generally, in fact, there was no disposition to try issues with mighty Rome. The fanaticism that gloried in being irreconcilable was limited, for the most part, to Judæa.

Yet the public excitement was intense, and even those who most dreaded war felt that it must come. Superstition helped to confirm this belief, for the wild fancies of such times found abundant portents of the impending wrath. In the time of Albinus, for instance, a great light was declared to have shone for half an hour, on the Passover night, making the altar and the Temple stand out as if in bright day. At the same feast, a heifer about to be sacrificed, was said to have brought forth a lamb. The great eastern gate of the Temple, of heavy brass, needing twenty men to shut it each evening, though closed and bolted into deep holes in the stone floor, was seen to open, one night, of its own accord, and could not be shut again without great difficulty. Then, again, on another evening, before sunset, chariots were seen in the air, and troops of soldiers in armour, running about among the clouds and besieging cities. Moreover, at the feast of Pentecost, as the priests were going into the inner Temple at night for their evening duties, they

reported that all at once, they felt the ground quake and heard a great noise, presently followed by a sound as of a multitude crying, "Let us go out of this!"

But that which most impressed the public mind was the appearance of a peasant in the streets of Jerusalem, in the year 62, when all was peace and prosperity, crying, during the feast of Tabernacles, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the Temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, and a voice against the whole people!" This doleful wail was heard in all the streets of the city, night and day, and raised so great an excitement that the Jewish authorities seized the offender and scourged him severely. Yet, when released, he at once recommenced his lamentable cry. Brought before the procurator for this new disturbance, he was scourged till his bones were laid bare, but he made no entreaty for mercy while undergoing this frightful punishment, nor did he shed any tears, but still, after every stroke, cried out "Woe to Jerusalem!" Led before Albinus again, he simply answered nothing to his questions—"Who he was?" and "Whence he came?" and was at last dismissed as a madman. Still, however, his doleful voice proclaimed continually, through all the city,—"Woe to Jerusalem!" as he stalked through the narrow streets, speaking to no one, but keeping aloof from all. Beaten by the evil-minded day after day, he never gave them a bitter word, nor did he thank those who gave him food: his only answer to any one being his fearful cry, which rose loudest at the great feasts, and continued for seven years and five months; stopping only when the siege began, and his prophecy was fulfilled. "For," says

Josephus, "as he was going round upon the wall, crying out, 'Woe to the city, and to the people, and to the Temple,' just as he added, 'Woe to me also!' a stone from one of the Roman catapults struck him dead in a moment, so that while he was still uttering the same foreboding laments, he expired."[1]

While things were thus ominous and distracted in Judæa—men's hearts failing them for fear, and for expectation of what was coming;—amid signs in the sun, and moon, and stars, and on the earth, and when a sea of troubles rolled its tempestuous billows ever higher,—a writing now sacred was being circulated among the Christians of Palestine. Scattered in small communities through the country at large, these were to be found chiefly in the poorest quarters of Jerusalem, for they were, as a rule, of so humble a class as to need the charity of their fellow-believers far and near, to keep them from actual want: their social position being, in fact, such, that, in ordinary times, even their enemies overlooked their existence.

This "Epistle," which was written by we do not now know whom, and came from we do not know whence, was addressed simply to the "Hebrews" of the new faith, being no other than the one included under that name in the New Testament. The absolute isolation from worldly affairs of the leaders of the churches could not be more vividly shown, than in the other-worldly character of this weighty document, for no one could gather from it the revolutionary state of affairs around those addressed, or that the air was electric, with no one knew what storms and forked lightnings, even now flashing

[1] Jos. *Bell. Jud.* vi. 5, 3.

from cloud to cloud in the gathering blackness. The feuds of Zealot and Roman had clearly no support in the lowly assemblies of the Nazarenes. They were evidently, in their own view, only strangers and pilgrims among their fellows, having no abiding city here, but "seeking after one that was to come."[1]

The name, "Hebrews," was that used in the apostolic age, by people of other countries, when speaking of the Jews of Palestine, and, by the Christians, of those of their number who were of pure Jewish blood, marked, as a rule, by their clinging to old Jewish usages and prejudices more than their brethren of foreign birth. As the Romans called the Hellenes, Greeks, as the Magyars are, even now, called "Hungarians" or foreigners, as the Germans are Allemands to the French, and as the old British of England, were known by their invaders as Welsh, or strangers, the Jews of Palestine were known by other races as Hebrews. Whether the inscription of the Epistle was, originally, exactly what it is now, cannot be decided, but it is at least known to be as old as about a hundred years after Christ's death. There can therefore be little doubt that the document was first intended for the Jewish-Christians living in their own land, speaking Jewish-Aramaic, though able to understand Greek, and probably Latin: for in polyglot cities such as Jerusalem then was, every child picks up a number of languages, as we see to-day, in Gibraltar or Valetta. Yet it would not be limited, in its designed circulation, to the Jewish-Christians of Palestine, for nearly all congregations of apostolic times consisted of Jewish as well as heathen-born converts. Some, however, have supposed it to have

[1] Heb. xiii. 14.

been written for the Christians of Alexandria, while others have held that it was intended for the churches in Rome, where it was so highly honoured that we find no fewer than thirty-seven references to it in the First Epistle of Clement—a Roman—to the Corinthians written towards the end of the first century, that is while, it may be, St. John was still living, though the belief that it was not written by the Apostle Paul was even then of long standing.

From the Epistle itself we learn that it was designed, in the first place, for a local Jewish-Christian congregation presided over by "rulers," as were the synagogues.[1] This community, moreover, must have been comparatively long established, for their first teachers had, apparently, died, and been replaced by successors:[2] some, it would seem, having perished as martyrs.[3] It had moreover, at some earlier time, endured bitter persecution, in which its members had been made a gazing-stock, by reproaches and afflictions, having, in some cases, been thrown into prison, and in others, stripped of their goods; their trials in one way or other amounting to a "great conflict of sufferings."[4] In all these trials they had nobly helped their suffering brethren; sharing their troubles with them.[5] and still continued the same loving ministries to the "saints," at the time of the Epistle's being written.[6] Nor had their rulers failed in true service to their people, for they "watched for their souls, as they that must give account."[7]

Things, however, were not altogether healthy in the

[1] Heb. xiii. 7, 17, 24; x. 25; xiii. 23.
[2] Heb. v. 12.
[3] Heb. xiii. 7.
[4] Heb. x. 32–34.
[5] Heb. x. 34.
[6] Heb. vi. 10
[7] Heb. xiii. 17.

congregation, who appear to have been a second generation of converts; the Gospel "at the first spoken" to them "through the Lord," doubtless by the apostles, having been "confirmed to the present church members by those who heard" these, its original preachers. There was now a highly dangerous decline of Christian faith. The delay in the expected appearing of Christ in His glory, had not only dimmed the hope, but had shaken the faith of many in Jesus, as the promised Messiah. The offence of the Cross began once more to trouble them, and, indeed, things had gone so far, that some not only absented themselves from the meetings of the church, but needed the most earnest warnings against falling away altogether to Judaism, now so hostile to Christianity.[1]

The church was not, therefore, in a position to resist as it otherwise might, and as it had formerly done, the continual persecutions and contemptuous treatment endured at the hands of their Jewish neighbours.[2]

A striking characteristic of the Epistle, and one throwing an interesting light on the constitution of the church addressed, is that it makes no allusion to a point then so vital as the relation of Jewish to heathen-born members. Had there been a mixture of the two, or had there been a heathen-born church in the same place, a writer so catholic in his feelings must have warned both, against the jealousies and disputes so common between them, and hence we may conclude that the membership was virtually altogether Jewish. It is clear, also, that, though Jewish, the church must have been more than friendly to the memory and party of the Apostle Paul,

[1] Heb. x. 25; vi. 4 ff.; x. 26 ff.; xii. 15 ff., 25 ff.
[2] Heb. xiii. 13; xii. 4 ff.

since the author implies their interest in the delivery of Timothy from prison, and tells them, for their gratification, that, when freed, the "beloved son" of St. Paul would come, with himself, to visit them.[1] He shows himself, moreover, thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the great Apostle, though certainly not one of his immediate scholars or helpers, but rather of the school of Apollos, and yet takes for granted that his exhortations will find a kindly reception among them; even speaking of himself as well known to them, if not indeed one of themselves.[2] Nor does it follow that the salutations sent them by the writer, from the Christians of Italy,[3] imply more than a friendly spirit towards them, in those round the author, when he wrote.

In these features of the Epistle, however, lie difficulties in connection with each of the three opinions as to the brethren addressed; whether they lived in Palestine, Alexandria, or Rome. But the decision must rest on the answer to the question, where lay the chief danger of a return to the hostile communion of Judaism, against which the Epistle is directed throughout. It could only have risen from religious convictions which had grown up in the congregation, as to the claims of the specifically Jewish system; its details, such as circumcision, or the strict observance of the Jewish Sabbath laws, or rules of clean and unclean, being only incidentally mentioned in the Epistle, without any prominence being assigned them.[4] The one ground of the threatened danger pressed in it must, therefore, have been the significance now attached to the Jewish Temple-worship, in connection

[1] Heb. xiii. 23. [2] Heb. xiii. 18–23.
[3] Heb. xiii. 24. [4] Heb. ix. 10; xiii. 9.

with the religious life of the hitherto strictly Christian community. They had evidently been led into the error of thinking that, to make sure of the forgiving grace of God, they must fall back on the mediation of the Jewish priesthood and on the observance of the Old Testament ceremonial worship. Unless, indeed, we are prepared to think that one so intimately acquainted with the position of affairs as the author of this Epistle, was entirely in error as to his view of the source of danger, it must be felt that the peril to those addressed was this disposition to return to the Temple-worship, very much more than any religious value they might attach to circumcision and the like. This, however, excludes all the congregations in Paul's field of labour, for though the Temple, as long as it stood, must have remained the centre of religious interest for all Jewish-born Christians even of the Dispersion, yet it was inevitable that its priestly worship could not be the supreme influence on their religious life, since they very seldom, and often never, went to Jerusalem. That which most intimately affected them must, rather, have been the specially Jewish usages and customs, which netted-over the whole of life with their requirements, and were the proud marks to every Jew of his belonging to the "holy nation," raising him infinitely above the "accursed" uncircumcised world which did not know the Law.[1] The Jewish contentions with which St. Paul had to fight, were always, as his Epistles show throughout, about these details, which imply no personal share in the Temple-worship.

This fact at once shuts out the theory that the 'Hebrews" was written to the Christians at Rome.

[1] John vii. 49.

As to the idea that the readers addressed were the Jewish-Christians of Alexandria, it is largely based on the fact that there was a Jewish temple at Leontopolis, in the Delta of Egypt, founded about B.C. 180, by the exiled high-priest Onias. But it was a poor copy of the mother sanctuary, and never had such a standing among the Alexandrian Jews that the local Jewish-Christian church could have been in any danger of relapsing into Judaism through its influence. Indeed the philosophising spirit illustrated by Philo, had so sublimated the whole Jewish system, that the outward observance of the national rites, and even of their local Temple-worship, had largely given place to a mere symbolical interpretation of them, which offered no temptations to the Christian community.

Hence Palestine only could have presented that full and exact display of the Old Testament Temple-worship which is the form of Judaism assailed in our Epistle. There, also, it was natural to find a purely Jewish church, and there, above all places, it is conceivable how kindly relations could be found with the school of Paul, in spite of high Judaistic tendencies. For, while, on the one hand, the land, and especially the Holy City, fostered a tenacious reverence for the customs and faith of their people; a reverence which Paul and his helpers had honoured, so long as it did not imperil the vital truths of the Gospel;[1] on the other hand, the great Apostle had shown his deep loyalty to his Jewish brethren, by the collections he had gathered, at huge cost of toil and anxiety, and he had been thrown into Roman captivity by his personally bringing these to Jerusalem. Proof of this kindly feeling had indeed been strikingly shown on his arrival in the

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 18; ix. 20.

Holy City, at his last generous but fatal visit; the brethren "receiving him gladly," and he, on his part, proving his wide charity by identifying himself with Jewish brethren wishing to be legally absolved from temporary Nazarite vows, and attending with them in the Temple for the discharge of the necessary rites; a large-hearted service which had ended so sadly.[1] The incidental hints in the Epistle, as to the past history of the church addressed, and as to their present condition, suit the story of no other congregation as they do that of the mother church at Jerusalem, up to the time of the breaking out of the Jewish War. Allusions appear, as it would seem, to the persecution at the death of Stephen, to the death of James the Elder, and that of James the Younger, in A.D. 62,[2] while the bitter trials endured at the hand of the high-priest, after his killing the last-named martyr, seem also to be recalled to the mind of the readers.[3]

The authorship of this great Epistle has been so much disputed, that it becomes criticism to be no less modest and diffident in discussing the question, than in deciding as to the congregation addressed, which has been variously imagined to have been in Spain, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, Macedonia, Greece, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Laodicea, Antioch, Corinth, Cyprus, Lycaonia, Italy, Rome, and a number of other places. In the same way, the author has been variously supposed to have been Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Clemens Romanus, Silvanus, and Apollos, but the result of the most searching study, amidst the conflict of opinion, and the contradictions of evidence, can only be, to leave the

[1] Acts xxi. 17, 20 ff.

[2] Heb. x. 32 ff.; xiii. 7; Acts viii. 1 ff.

[3] Heb. xiii. 12.

question no less doubtful than that respecting the circle to which the Epistle was written.

The belief that we are indebted to St. Paul for this great contribution to the sacred writings is alike ancient and widely spread, as was natural, from its tone so strongly resembling that of his acknowledged writings, and from Timothy being mentioned in it as in close relations with its author.[1] But on close examination we find nothing that decides this, while there is much that appears to show that it is without any real support. It would be tiresome and useless to drag the general reader through citations of the arguments, one way or other, of Christian antiquity, but it is undoubted that the testimony in favour of St. Paul having written it is neither so universal nor so confident as might be expected, had the Epistle been regarded from the first as his. The Alexandrian church, while not pronouncing against its being so, is not at all decided in its opinion. Paul is named, indeed, as author, by an Alexandrian, about the middle of the second century, but he weakens his opinion by attributing the absence of Paul's name in the title —contrary to his constant practice in his other writings —to the prejudice of the Judaisers against him, or to a profound sense of inferiority in the apostle to our Lord, who, as the writer thinks, had been the Apostle originally sent by God to them.[2] Clement of Alexandria, however, does not venture to think the Epistle in its present state directly assignable to Paul, but fancies that the absence of the apostle's name, and the differences

[1] Heb. xiii. 23.

[2] Pantænus, with whom agrees Clement of Alexandria, his scholar, in the end of the second and the opening of the third century. Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.* vi. 14.

from his ordinary style, indicate its having been written for Paul by St. Luke, from a Hebrew original actually by the apostle.[1] Origen, who died in A.D. 254, fancies that only the thoughts embodied in the Epistle are Paul's; the language and composition being those of some one else. "If," says he, "any church considers this epistle as coming from St. Paul, let it be commended for this, . . . but who it was that actually wrote it, God only knows."[2] In the old Syrian Church, the Epistle is placed, in the ancient Peschito Version, dating about the close of the second century, after the other Epistles of Paul, as if to show that it is regarded as entitled to that position from its resemblance to them in character, while not really one of them.

But while the Eastern churches were favourable to at least the indirect authorship of Paul, those of the West, in the first centuries, questioned his having any connection with it. Tertullian fancies it written by Barnabas; stating this as if it were the common opinion of the African churches,[3] as it was, apparently, of Cyprian of Carthage. Nor did the old Roman churches think the Epistle was by Paul, though they furnish the earliest trace of its being in use among the congregations. Even in the middle of the third century it was not attributed to our apostle, or even accepted as canonical; Eusebius, in the first half of the fourth century, telling us that, even then, "some of the Romans do not consider it to be the work of the apostles." It was only from the middle of the fourth century that the authorship by Paul found gradual acceptance in the West, through the influence of the East in such matters.

[1] Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.* vi. 14. [2] Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.* vi. 25.
[3] Tertull. *de Pudicitia*, c. 20.

The incidental glimpses which the Epistle gives us of its author, are an additional reason for ascribing it to some other. Thus, he speaks of himself[1] as having learned the Gospel not directly from Christ, but from the lips of those who heard Him; language which it was impossible for Paul, of all men, to use, for it places him in an inferiority to the Twelve, and assigns him no higher rank than that claimed by Luke.[2] How different from the way in which Paul always speaks of his apostolate, as given by Christ directly, and of his having been taught the Gospel by no human agents![3]

Support has been thought to be found in the words translated, in our Authorised Version,[4] "Ye had compassion of me in my bonds," but this vanishes when we learn that the true reading is, "Ye had compassion on them that were in bonds." In the request, in another text, that the Hebrews would pray for him,[5] a further allusion has been fancied to be made to Paul's imprisonment, but we learn a few verses beyond, that the writer was not in prison, but ready to visit the congregation addressed, with Timothy, then recently set at liberty.[6] Nor is Paul's authorship involved from the mention of Timothy as in brotherly relations to the composer, for Paul speaks of that loved one rather as his son than his brother, though, no doubt, using both expressions at different times. But for the single case in which he calls him "brother," we have him three times spoken of as "his true child," his "child," and his "beloved child,"[7] and he is always referred to as in a subordinate standing to

[1] Heb. ii. 3. [2] Luke i. 2.
[3] Gal. i. 1, 11, 12, 15, 16; ii. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 1; xi. 23; Ephes. iii. 2, 3.
[4] Heb. x. 34. [5] Heb. xiii. 18. [6] Heb. xiii. 23.
[7] 2 Cor. i. 1; 1 Tim. i. 2, 18; 2 Tim. i. 2, R.V.

the apostle, which is not the case where he is mentioned in the "Hebrews."[1] He is, moreover, spoken of as now set at liberty, so that his imprisonment must have been a serious matter, lasting so long that news of it had reached the readers of the Epistle. But there is no hint of any imprisonment of Timothy while he was Paul's helper, and hence it is much more probable that it befell him after Paul's death. That it should, moreover, be added "They of Italy salute you," may indicate that the Epistle was written from some part of that peninsula, but it does not connect it with St. Paul as the author.[2]

The contrast between the style of the writer of this Epistle and that of Paul has, from the earliest times, been felt to prove that some one else than the great Apostle was the author. Not only is "Hebrews," throughout, written in purer Greek than Paul's,—its Hebraisms being mostly confined to the quotations from the Old Testament; its style is more finished and rhetorical. While Paul, as it were, wrestles with his language, as if his thoughts were too full for adequate expression; and grammatical irregularities, changes of structure in his sentences, and want of sequence in the composition, are frequent with him, the "Hebrews" flows on in smooth ease. Unlike Paul, even where parentheses of striking length are introduced, the writer turns back, at their close, to the strict continuity of his main theme.[3] While Paul thinks only on the subject in his mind; the author of this Epistle, throughout, pays constant attention to beauty of style and cultured rhetoric. But while the external form is so much more polished, the essential force of character displayed, falls greatly behind that of

[1] Heb. xiii. 23. [2] Heb. xiii. 24. [3] Heb. vii. 20 ff.

the Apostle, for we miss the argumentative sharpness, the strong firm connection of thought, and the exactness and clearness of expression, that mark the writings of St. Paul.

Nor is it to be overlooked that, while there is the most perfect agreement between Paul's Epistles and the "Hebrews" on all essential points, they present the Resurrection of Christ as the weightiest fact in the scheme of salvation, while in "Hebrews" it is only once casually mentioned, in the closing benediction;[1] the great themes of the Epistle being the death of Christ and His heavenly priesthood, at the right hand of God.

While, moreover, Paul not only uses the Greek Bible, but varies it by colourings from the Hebrew text, often translating it for himself, and, as a rule, quoting from memory, without verbal exactness, — the author of "Hebrews" quotes exclusively from the Greek version, and that, in nearly all cases, very closely, using even, at times, its misrenderings of the Hebrew, so that he could have had little if any acquaintance with the original.[2] A curious side light is further thrown on the whole subject, by the fact that, in his description of the arrangements of the Jerusalem Temple, as he supposes them still existing at that time,[3] he shows himself imperfectly informed as to details which could not have been unknown to Paul, who had lived for years in the Holy City as a rabbinical student. Nor is it, in any case, probable, that he who so strictly avoided intruding on a sphere not really his own, would have violated a principle so fundamental with him, as to have written to a Jewish-Christian congregation, especially to one in Palestine, the sphere of his brother apostles, and in no sense his own.

[1] Heb. xiii. 20. [2] Heb. x. 5–7.

[3] Heb. ix. 1–6. See the text, given hereafter, as it really stands.

But if the idea of Paul having written the "Hebrews" be abandoned, it is, in my opinion, impossible to suggest with confidence any other name as that of its author. Of St. Luke it is enough to say that he was a heathen-born convert, and, as such, specially unfitted to have composed such a Jewish-Christian Epistle. Barnabas, a Levite, long resident in Jerusalem, where he possessed property in land,[1] must, on the other hand, have had a perfect acquaintance with the Temple arrangements, and its details of worship, and could not, therefore, have been under the misapprehensions with respect to them on some points, which meet us in the Epistle. Silvanus has been proposed as author, but he, also, was a Jerusalem man, and must have been as familiar as Barnabas with everything about the temple.

The name of Apollos was first suggested as the writer by Luther, and has much in its favour. The glimpses of him which we have in the Acts, and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, show endowments and character strikingly in keeping with the unconscious touches of self-disclosure given us by the writer of the "Hebrews." So marked, indeed, are the undesigned coincidences, that it neutralises any weight otherwise due to the fact that among the conjectures respecting the authorship in antiquity, his name does not appear. He was not a direct disciple of Christ, but belonged to the second generation of converts. He had been instructed carefully in Christian doctrine by friends of Paul, and was received by the apostle himself into close personal relations. His originality of mind and general ability, however, so completely raised him above the position of a

[1] Acts iv. 36, 37.

mere subordinate, that, against his desire, a section of the Corinthian church became specially his followers. A Jew by birth, his zeal as a Christian teacher naturally turned towards his own race,—so that his intimacy with the Palestine Jews, to whom the "Hebrews" was sent, is easily understood. As a Jew of Alexandria, he was mighty in the Scriptures, and skilled in expounding and applying them, so as to bring forward the multiplied proofs they offered of Jesus being the Messiah. Moreover, as an Alexandrian, the predominantly typical-symbolic mode of writing in the Epistle, seeking to show a deeper and more spiritual meaning underneath the literal, is exactly the mental peculiarity his training would give him. Above all, he was distinguished by the gift of a brilliant eloquence, just such as the "Hebrews" offers us, while Alexandria would equip him with the culture, and the knowledge of the Greek Bible exclusively, which the Epistle shows, though it is not surprising that he should remain imperfectly acquainted with the minor arrangements of the Temple at Jerusalem. On all these grounds he seems to have the best claims to the authorship. Yet it is by no means certain that he was the only man, whether of Alexandria or elsewhere, who, in that age, was "learned and mighty in the Scriptures," or who was marked by the various characteristics shown in the Epistle. It can always be urged, moreover, that not the smallest evidence can be produced that Apollos wrote it, while the idea that he possessed the peculiar powers shown in "Hebrews" may be a wrong inference from the few words told us respecting him. His name, in fact, can only be advanced as a probable conjecture.

CHAPTER IV

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS—(*Continued*).

THE Mosaic dispensation inferior to the Christian.

I. 1. God having spoken, of old times, to the fathers, in the *prophets*, in different portions and different ways, 2. has, at the end of these days,[1] before the return of our Lord, spoken to us in Him, His *Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3. who being the effulgence or out-shining of His glory, and the express image of His substance or essence, as the coin is the duplicate of the die, and upholding all things by the word of His power,—after He had made our cleansing from sins, by His death,[2] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; 4. having become so much higher than the angels, as He has inherited a more exalted name—that of Son,—than they

Infinite elevation of our Lord, as the SON, above Angels.

5. For to which of the angels has He, God, said at any time, *Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?*[3] and again—*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?*[4] 6. And, when He bringeth in the first-born of many brethren[5] again, into the world, at His second coming, He, God, says, *And let all the angels of God worship Him.*[6] 7. And of the angels He says—*Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.*[7] 8. But of the Son

[1] Heb. x. 37; ix. 26. [2] Heb. x. 12, 14. [3] Ps. ii. 7.
[4] 2 Sam. vii. 14, LXX. [5] Rom. viii. 29.
[6] Deut. xxxii. 43, LXX. The words are not in the Hebrew.
[7] Ps. civ. 4. That, in contrast to the Son, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the angels, as inferior, were subject to be changed

He says—*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; and the sceptre of purest right is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.* 9. *Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.*[1] 10. And—*Thou, Lord,*[2] *in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands:* 11. *they shall perish, but Thou continuest: and they shall all wax old as does a garment;* 12. *and as a mantle thrown round one shalt Thou roll them up,* or *as a garment, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail.* 13. But of which of the angels has He ever said—*Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet?*[3] 14. Are not they, the angels, all, ministering spirits, sent forth to do service on behalf of them who shall inherit salvation?

II. 1. Therefore, since Christ, as the mediator of the New Covenant, is so exalted above the angels, who were the mediators of the Old Covenant,[4] we ought to give the more earnest heed, or, to hold the more firmly, to what we have heard, that is, to the Gospel preached to us by our Lord and His apostles, lest we may haply drift away and lose what they offer us. 2. For if the word of the Mosaic law, spoken, as your tradition teaches, through angels,[5] proved steadfast in its threats and penalties, and every transgression and disobedience re-

into whatever form God pleased, for special ends, was often maintained by the rabbis. Thus in Schemoth Rabba, sect. 25, fol. 123, 3, we read "Sometimes He makes the angels into winds, as it is said, 'Who makest Thy angels winds,' and sometimes into fire, as it is written, 'And Thy ministers a flame of fire.'" So Jalkut Simeoni, Part ii., fol. 11, 3: "The angel said to Manoah, 'I do not know into what or whose likeness I am made, for God changes our form hour by hour; why, therefore, do you ask my name? Sometimes He makes us fire, sometimes winds, sometimes men, and then, again, angels.'"

[1] Ps. xlv. 6, 7. The psalm is an epithalamium for some Jewish king, but it is applied to the Messiah by the rabbis, as well as in our text.

[2] Ps. cii. 25-27, from the LXX., which substitutes "Lord"—the usual name for Christ—for the "Jehovah" of the Hebrew.

[3] Ps. cx. 1, LXX. [4] Gal. ii. 19. [5] Geikie's "St. Paul," i. 35

ceived a just punishment: 3. how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation—so high above that of the Mosaic law?—which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, not through mere angels, was confirmed to us by them that heard it from the Lord's lips; 4. God, Himself, further bearing witness to it, in connection with them, by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost imparted to believers, according to His own will.

Further disclosure of the relation of Jesus to the angels, and proof from this of the necessity of His death are now given. Scripture tells us that the Messianic economy is to be under the Son of Man; not under the angels, and yet, undoubtedly, He was for a short time made lower than they are. But that was necessary, that He might win our salvation; for He must needs suffer and die, and be made in all things like us, His brethren, to be able to intercede effectually with God for us, as our great High Priest.

5. For He, God, did not subject the world to come, of which we speak, to *angels*. 6. But one has somewhere testified, saying,[1] *What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that Thou visitest him? 7. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands: 8. Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet.* For in saying that "all things are subjected to him," He, God, left out nothing as not subjected to him. But we do not, now, as yet, see all things thus subjected to him. 9. But, though this be so, the Scripture is vindicated, for we see Him—Jesus, who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, by His becoming man, now crowned with glory and honour, because of the suffering of death, to which He humbled

[1] Ps. viii. 5–7, LXX. verbatim.

Himself, as ordained by the sovereign grace and love of God,[1] that He should, as Saviour, taste death for every man. 10. For it became Him for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect, as such, through sufferings.

God's true people are His "sons," and as such, are one with Jesus THE SON.

11. For both He that sanctifies believers and they that are sanctified through His atoning death, are all sons of one Father: for which cause He, Jesus, the sanctifier, is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12. saying,—*I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing Thy praise*;[2] 13. and again, *I will put My trust in Him.* And again, *Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me.*[3]

That Christ should submit to death was necessary, in order that He might be the Saviour of sinful men. But to be capable of enduring suffering, He must become a man like other men, and stand on the same footing as that of those to be redeemed.

14. Since then the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself, in the same way, took part in the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15. and might deliver all them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime held in bondage.

[1] John iii. 16; Rom. v. 8; Gal. ii. 21.

[2] Ps. xxii. 22, LXX. verbatim, except the first word. In its direct application these words are a vow of praise to God, by the composer of the psalm, for deliverance, which he craves from Him, out of great trouble. The author of the Epistle applies it to the Messiah.

[3] Isa. viii. 17, 18.

The necessity for the Saviour becoming man is presented from another point of view.

16. For, truly, He does not take hold of angels, **to help and succour them**, but He takes hold of the seed of Abraham,—**you Jews,—though He is also the Saviour of all others who believe**. 17. Therefore it behoved Him to be made like His brethren in all things, **in flesh and blood, in life and in dying**, that He might be a sympathetic and faithful high priest in matters pertaining **to their relations** to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them **that are** tempted.

But Christ is also higher than Moses, since **the Son**, who rules over the house, is higher than the servants of the house. Thus, as he is above the angelic mediators of the Old Covenant, so He is above its human mediator.

III. 1. Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our **Christian** confession,—**our Christian faith**, even Jesus; 2. who was faithful to Him, **God**, who appointed Him **to this office**, as also was Moses in all His, God's, house—**His people Israel—then the "Kingdom of God."** 3. For He has been counted **by God** worthy of more glory than Moses, as He who built the house has more honour than the house. 4. For every house is built by some one; but He that built all things is God. **and thus the New Covenant no less than the Old, is God's.** 5. And **as to** Moses, **He** indeed was faithful in all His **God's**, house, as a servant, for the testifying to those things, **the commands of the Law**, which were afterwards to be spoken, **from Sinai**. 6. But Christ **was faithful** as a SON, over His, **God's**, house; whose house are we, if we hold fast our firm confidence, and the glorying in our hope, steadfast to the end, **that is, till He come**.

To stimulate all to this tenacious loyalty to the Gospel let the exhortation of God to them, based on the failure of their ancestors to realise a similar hope held out to them, of entering into the Promised Land, dwell in their minds. For, they well knew that the generation saved from Egypt, after all, came short of Canaan, and perished in the wilderness, through their unbelief.

7. Therefore, even as the Holy Ghost says **through the prophet,**[1] *To-day, if ye will hear His voice,* 8. *harden not your hearts, as* it happened *in the provocation,* or, in the Hebrew, at Massah and Meribah[2]—harden not your hearts, I say, *as in the day of temptation* of God, by the rebelliousness of the people *in the wilderness,* 9. *in which your fathers tempted Me, and put Me to the proof, and,* as the result, *saw My works forty years,* in which I kept them in the desert. 10. *Therefore I was displeased with this generation, and said, They do always err in their heart: but they did not* come to *know My ways;* that I would keep My word during all these forty years. 11. *As I swore* it *in My wrath*[3] when they murmured at the report of the spies, while still fresh from Sinai—saying—*They shall not enter into My rest.*

In this quotation, "To-day" is used as the time of salvation which had opened with the ministry of Christ, and the voice of God is the offer of mercy, which went forth through the Gospel, to those addressed. The forty years during which the Jews are said to have seen God's works, are joined, in the Hebrew, to the next verse, so that it makes God to have been displeased with them all that time; the change having very possibly been made

[1] Ps. xcv. 7 ff. from LXX. with slight variations, doubtless from a different Hebrew text.

[2] Exod. xvii. 7; Num. xx. 13, 24; Deut. xxxii. 51; Ps. lxxxi.

[3] Num. xiv. 23.

by the writer of the Epistle, to suggest a parallel, in the minds of his readers, between the time during which God bore with their fathers, and the nearly equal time during which the Gospel had been among them; dating from the opening of Christ's ministry. The lesson and warning now go on still more earnestly.

12. Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, showing itself in falling away from the living God: 13. but exhort one another, day by day as long as it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; 14. for we have become partakers of Christ—in His graces bestowed here, and in His glory hereafter, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end. 15. When it is said, then—*To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation*, 16. who, I would ask, were they, who, although they heard God's voice, thus provoked Him? Was it not, indeed, all they that came out of Egypt by Moses? 17. And with whom was He displeased forty years? Was it not with them that sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? 18. And to whom did He swear that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that were disobedient? 19. We see, then, that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief.

The divine promise of entering into God's rest is, thus, it is implied, not yet fulfilled. Let all take care that the salvation offered to them in Christ be not forfeited by their disobedience or unbelief, as the possession of Canaan was lost by that generation.

IV. 1. Let *us* therefore fear, lest, haply, while a promise is still continued of His people entering into His, God's, rest, any of *you* should be hereafter adjudged to have come short of it. 2. For, indeed, we have had good tidings preached to us, just

as they had: but the word which they thus heard did not profit them, not being received into the hearts, and thus being united, by faith in it, with the conscience of them that heard it. 3. For we only who have believed do really enter by faith, even here, into that rest of God; as He has said,—*As I sware in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest.* Though the works of God were finished from the foundation of the world; immediately after which God's Sabbath-rest began, in which the Israelites, had they been worthy, could at once have had a share. 4. For He, God, has spoken in this way in one place, of the seventh day, *And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.* 5. And in this place, again—*They shall not enter into My rest.*

Since the promise of entering into the Rest of God is not yet fulfilled, it is all important that they do not shut themselves out of it by falling away from Christ.

6. Seeing therefore that it remains certain that some must enter into it, and they, your forefathers, to whom the good tidings of God's rest in the promised land were, in earlier times, preached, failed to enter in because of disobedience, 7. He, God, again, in later days, appoints a certain day, saying in David, that is, the Psalms,—so long after His first speaking, *To-day*, as it has before been said, *To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.*[1] 8. For if Joshua had given them rest, He, God, would not have spoken afterwards of another day. 9. There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-rest, as your rabbis call it, for the people of God. 10. For he, among men, that is entered into His, God's, rest, has, Himself, also, rested from His works, as God did from His. 11. Let us, therefore, give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience.

Solemn enforcement of this exhortation; all the

[1] Ps. xcv. 7, 8.

threatenings of God's word, in the Psalm just quoted, being certain of fulfilment, as truly as its conditional promise.

12. For the Word of God, just quoted, is living, and full of living energy, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and it is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13. And there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Christ has been shown to be higher than the angels and than Moses: He is now shown to be infinitely exalted above the Levitical priesthood, with whose office his has been compared.

14. Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession of Him as such, and as our Saviour. 15. For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who has been tempted, in all points, just as we are, yet without sin. 16. Let us therefore draw near with confidence, to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.

There are two necessary characteristics of the earthly high-priest; he must be a man, that as such, subject to human weakness, he may be able to sympathise with the erring, and, also, that he should have been called by God to his office; not self-appointed. Both these characteristics are to be found in Christ.

V. 1. For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed *for* men, in things pertaining to God—that is, to perform the religious ministrations required by God, namely

—that he as priest may offer to Him both gifts and sacrifices for sins, 2. as one who can deal gently with the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is compassed with infirmity, 3. and is, on this ground, bound, as for the people, so, also, for himself, to offer for sins.

He must also be appointed to his office by God.

4. And as no man takes the honour to himself, save he who is called to it by God, as was Aaron, 5. so Christ, also, did not of Himself assume the glory of a high priest, but He was thus exalted by Him who said to Him, *Thou art My Son. this day have I begotten Thee*,[1] 6. as He says also, in another place, *Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.*[2]

So far, indeed, was He from appointing Himself to His office, that, throughout all His life, He showed the most lowly obedience to God, in all that the divine will ordered, in fitting Him perfectly for it.

7. Who, in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and having for His reverend fear of God been heard by Him, as we see in His rising from the dead and entering into His heavenly glory; 8. thus, though He was a Son, yet even He learned obedience, through the things which He suffered: 9. and so having been made perfect, He became to all them that obey Him, the author of eternal salvation; 10. being declared by God a high priest after the order of Melchisedek.

The high-priestly office of Christ is now to be set forth at greater length, but, to prepare the minds of the readers, the writer feels it needful to remark, how much farther below the standard of Christian knowledge they are, than,

[1] Ps. ii. 7. [2] Ps. cx. 4.

for the time they have been believers, was to be expected. He urges them, therefore, to advance, and warns them of the hopeless position of those, who, while knowing fully the blessedness of Christianity, fall away from it. May those still faithful continue so to the end!

11. On which subject we have many things to say, yet it is hard to make them plain to you, because you have become dull of hearing. 12. For though, according to the time since you became Christians, you ought to be teachers, you have need, that some one teach you again, the very rudiments of the oracles of God, and have come to need milk again, and not solid food; 13. for every one who takes to milk, is still without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. 14. But solid food is for full-grown men; those who, being used to it, have their minds trained and fitted to discern between what is good and what is evil.

The motives that should lead them to this advance are weighty.

VI. 1. Therefore, let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on to the full completeness of His doctrine; not laying again the mere foundation, the elementary doctrines, of repentance from dead works and faith toward God, 2. of the meaning of baptisms, and of laying on of hands after baptism, to receive the Holy Ghost, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3. And this thing—giving you more advanced teaching—will we do, if God permit. 4. For, as respects those once enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, 5. and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 6. and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again, so as to lead them to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame by this apostasy: for they by such a

falling away treat Him as if He had been rightly crucified, as an evil-doer and deceiver. 7. For as the land that has drunk-in the rain that comes often on it, and brings forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is tilled, receives blessing from God; 8. yet, if, instead of this, it bear thorns and thistles, it is treated as worthless by God, and is near the curse of eternal barrenness; and its end is to be burned as was the land of Sodom, into eternal barrenness, by fire from heaven; so is it with us; to bear fruit, brings blessing; to bear the thorns and thistles of apostasy, brings God's curse.

He feels sure, however, that this will not be their doom. Only, let them continue faithful. God remembers their past good works, and will note those of times to come.

9. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you; things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak: 10. for God is not unrighteous, that He should forget your work, and the love you have shown toward His name, in your ministering to the saints as you have done and still do. 11. And we earnestly trust that each one of you may show the same zeal which leads to the full certainty of hope, even to the end; 12. that ye be not slothful, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, already inherit the promises.

Enduring faith secures the inheritance of these promises.

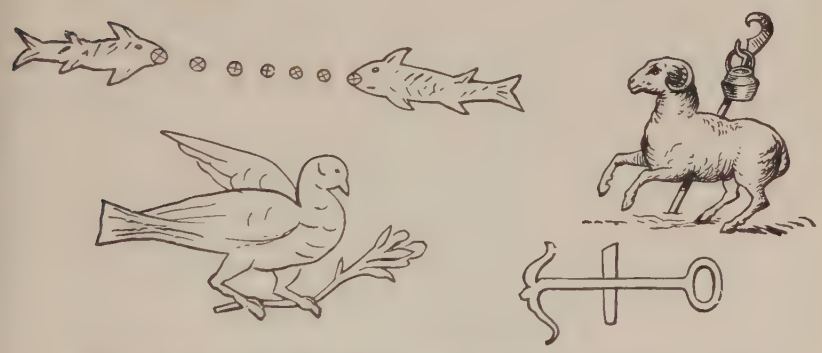
13. For, to give you a proof of this, when God made the promise to Abraham, He sware by Himself, since He could swear by no greater, 14. saying, to confirm it, *Surely, blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.*[1] 15. And in this way, by this oath, after having patiently endured, he, Abraham, obtained the fulfilment of the promise, in the birth of Isaac.

In the same way, the certain fulfilment of the promises

[1] Gen. xxii. 17.

in Christ was confirmed by an oath of God, so that our confidence may be absolute.

16. For men in their promises, swear by the greater, that is, by God; and in every dispute they have, the oath is the end of it, as a confirmation of its being arranged. 17. So, conforming Himself to human ways, God, with a view to show, in a special manner, to the heirs of the Christian promise, the immutability of His purpose, intervened with an oath; 18. that



Symbols used by the ancient Christians: The Fish, from the letters of its name in Greek, ἰχθύς, being the initials of Ἰησοῦς Χριστός θεοῦ υἱός Σωτήρ—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour; the Lamb; the Dove; and the Anchor.

by two immutable things, the promise and the oath, in relation to which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before us, as even now laid up for us above; 19. which we have as an anchor of the soul—sure and steadfast as an anchor; a hope entering into that Holy of Holies which is within the veil of the temple in the heavens, the counterpart of the Holy of Holies on Mount Zion, where God sits throned on the mercy-seat. 20. Whither, as a forerunner,

Jesus entered to intercede for us, as the high priest enters that of the temple here, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.

Explanation of the High-Priesthood of Christ, with an introductory statement respecting Melchisedek, showing, from Scripture, his greatness as high-priest, and pointing out how, in three ways, he stood above the Levitical priests.

VII. 1. For this Melchisedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham when he was returning from the slaughter of the kings, and as a priest blessed him, 2. to whom, on the other hand, Abraham also divided off a tenth part of all the spoil, as to a priest,—abideth a priest for ever, his very name and title as it were implying this, being, as to the first, by interpretation, "King of Righteousness," and then, also, as to the second, "King of Salem," which means, king of peace. 3. His *abiding* priesthood is, moreover, shown, by his being, as it were, without father, without mother, without genealogy, that is, priestly successors—nothing being said on these points, he having, moreover, so far as is recorded, neither any beginning of his days, nor end of his life, so that, by this silence of Scripture, he becomes a fitting type of Christ, as thus made, as it were, like the Son of God.[1]

The writer enlarges on the greatness of this typical priest.

[1] As neither the parentage nor the place of birth of Melchisedek, nor of his successors in his priestly office, is mentioned in Genesis, he is adopted in our Epistle as uniquely resembling our Lord, in his high-priesthood. A disclosure in the cuneiform tablets found at Tel Amarna, throws light on the whole incident in Genesis. Palestine was then an Egyptian province, and in one of the tablets the Egyptian governor of Jerusalem, long before the Exodus, claims to have been appointed to his office by the local god, through an oracle, and not by the Pharaoh or any earthly authority. "Salim" was the Chaldean god of peace, and "Jeru" is "the city of." See the whole story in Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," new edition, i. 340 ff.

4. Now consider how great this man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch of our race, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils. 5. Mark therefore this first point. They indeed, of the sons of Levi who receive the priesthood, have commandment to tithe *the people*, according to the law,—that is, to take tithes of their *brethren*, though these like themselves have come out of the loins of Abraham: 6. but he—an alien—whose genealogy is not derived from them, the sons of Levi, and who is not of their blood, has taken tithes of *Abraham*, and has blessed him who has received the promises from the very mouth of God, Himself. 7. But, without any dispute, the less is always blessed of the greater, so that Melchisedek was greater than even Abraham. 8. And, further, here, in the case of the Levites, men that die receive tithes; but there, in the case of Melchisedek, one of whom it is witnessed in Scripture, only, that he liveth, no mention being made of his dying, while the psalm speaks of his order being for ever,[1] received Abraham's tithes. 9. And thus, so to say, through Abraham, even Levi, who *receives* tithes, has *paid* tithes; 10. for he, Levi, was yet in the loins of his forefather Abraham, when Melchisedek met him, and thus Abraham's tithes were equivalent to the tithing of his posterity also.

But, indeed, the Levitical priesthood has now lost its importance, in common with the Mosaic law.

11. Now, if there was perfection—a perfect expiation, through the *Levitical* priesthood—for the people Israel has received the law under, and through, the ordained services of this priesthood—what further need was there that another kind of priest should arise after the order of *Melchisedek*, and not be named according to the priestly order of Aaron? 12. For the priesthood being thus changed, there necessarily follows, also, a change of the law, or priestly constitution, ministered by the order of Levi. 13. For He—Jesus—of whom these things are said in Scripture, "Thou art a priest for ever

[1] Ps. cx. 4.

after the order of Melchisedek," belonged to another tribe than Levi—a tribe—Judah, from which no man has given priestly attendance at the altar. 14. For it is evident that our Lord has sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning there ever being priests.

The abrogation of the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law is still more clearly proved, by the Holy Spirit saying that the new Priest is to be like Melchisedek, which involves characteristics quite different from those of the old priesthood.

15. And still more is it abundantly clear that the Mosaic law is changed and abrogated, along with the Levitical priesthood, if another priest, after the likeness of Melchisedek, rises, 16. who has been made priest, not after the law of a fleshly command, limited to fleshly descent, but after the power of an endless life. 17. But that this is found in Jesus is proved by Scripture, for it is written of Him,—*Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.*

The mighty consequences flowing from this.

18. For there is, as a necessary result of this, a cancelling of the foregoing commandment respecting the Levitical priesthood, because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19. for that law made nothing perfect[1] — and, thus, a bringing in, at the same time, of a better hope, through which we draw nigh unto God; not needing, like these under the old law, to stand far off, outside the Holy of Holies. 20. And inasmuch as Christ was not appointed without the taking of an oath by God—21. for they indeed whom He has superseded have been appointed priests without any such oath; but He was appointed with an oath by Him, God, who says of Him,—*The Lord sware and will not change His mind,—Thou art a priest for ever*;[2]—22. by so much, therefore, has Jesus become the

[1] Verse 11. [2] Ps. cx. 4.

surety of a better covenant, than the Levitical or Mosaic. 23. And further, they, indeed, have been made priests, one after the other, many in number, because by death they are prevented from continuing to hold their office: 24. but He, Jesus, because He lives for ever, holds an unchangeable deathless priesthood. 25. On which account also, He is able to save to the uttermost, perfectly, fully, them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26. For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, being withdrawn from all defiling contact with them, by passing up to the right hand of God, and being thus made higher than the visible heavens; for God dwells in the highest heavenly regions beyond those we see; 27. a high priest who needs not daily, like those high priests of the sons of Levi, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for those of the people: for this He did, once for all, when He offered up Himself. 28. For the Levitical law appoints *men* high priests, who have human frailty; but the word of the oath, which was made later than the law, in David[1] appoints a Son,[2] perfected, as high priest, for ever more.

Christ is far above the Levitical priesthood, not only in His *Person*, but also in the glory of the sanctuary in which He acts as High-Priest.

VIII. 1. Now, of the things which we are saying, the chief point, the pith, is this: We have such a high priest as has been described, who has sat down on the right hand, the seat of honour, of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2. as a priestly ministrant of the sanctuary, and of the *true* tabernacle, the *archetype* of that of Israel, which God, the Lord, pitched, not man; the divinely conceived original, of which that of earth was only an imperfect copy.

[1] Ps. cx. 4. [2] Heb. iv. 14.

There is need of such a second priestly ministration, as there was of a second priesthood.

3. For, since, as the vital feature of his office, every high priest is appointed in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices, it is necessary that this high priest, also, have somewhat to offer. 4. Now, if He, Jesus, were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those already provided, who offer the gifts of the people—their sacrifices according to the law; 5. who serve the temple, which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,—the *true* tabernacle and its ministrations,—in keeping with the divine directions received by Moses when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, *See*, saith He, God,[1] *that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount:* that pattern being a copy of the *true* tabernacle in the heavens. 6. But now, in contrast to all this, has He, Christ, obtained a ministry as much more excellent than that of the Levitical priesthood, as the covenant of which He is mediator is better than that of which Moses was the mediator; his covenant —that of Jesus—being one, which has been established on better promises.

Proof from Scripture that the New Covenant rests on better promises than the Old, and is thus better.

7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought by God for a second. But the proof that the first covenant was not faultless, and that God had published His purpose to make a new one, is seen in Scripture, 8. for, finding fault with them—those who lived under the first covenant, He, God, says, *Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;* 9. *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt. For*

[1] Exod. xxv. 40.

they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord. 10. *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.* 11. *And they shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.* 12. *For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no more.*[1] 13. Inasmuch as He, God, here says, *A new covenant*, He has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and is wearing out, is nigh to vanishing away.

The Levitical priests were mortal, but Christ lives for ever; their sanctuary was on earth, that in which Christ is High-Priest is in the heavens; and hence the Covenant of which He is Mediator must be correspondingly better than that of Moses. Indeed, in the characteristics of the old Tabernacle and of the Temple, signs were not wanting, that neither represented a perfect religion, but only one which was a preparation for a higher. The Old Testament sanctuary is first sketched, in the main features of its arrangements.

IX. 1. Now also, the first covenant, as we know, had ordinances of divine service, and its sanctuary, that which was in *this* world; not, like that of Christ, in the heavens. 2. For there was a tabernacle prepared by Moses at the command of God, in two parts; the first, in which were the candlestick, and the table, and the setting forth of the shew-bread on it; which part is called the Holy Place. 3. And behind the second veil, is the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies: 4. containing a Golden Altar of incense, and

[1] Jer. xxxi. 31–34.

the Ark of the Covenant, overlaid, round about, with gold, in which was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's, rod that budded, and the stone tables of the covenant; 5. and, over it, cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which things we cannot now speak in detail.[1]

[1] Exod. xxv. 31–39; xxxvii. 17–24; xvi. 33; xxv. 10 ff., 23–30; xxvi. 35; xxxvii. 10–16; xxx. 1–10; xxxvii. 25–28; xxv. 18 ff.; xxxvii. 7 ff. In the Temple of Herod there were ten "candlesticks" (*Bell. Jud.* v. 5, 5; vii. 5, 5), as in that of Solomon (1 Kings vii. 49); but in the Tabernacle and second Temple, only one (Zech. iv. 2). Of a golden censer, as the word I have rendered "altar" is translated by some, specially devoted to the service of the great day of Atonement, there is no mention in the Old Testament, for the censer mentioned in a verse of Leviticus (Lev. xvi. 12) was taken from the altar outside. There is no trace of the existence of one in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, as our text presupposes. It first appears in a tract of the Mischna (Joma iv. 4). This censer, we are there told, was kept, not in the Holy of Holies, but in the storehouse of sacred vessels, and taken out and carried into the Most Holy Place by the high-priest, and then, after being used there, on the one annual occasion, taken back to the storehouse again. But if the word be translated "golden altar-of-incense," the difficulty rises that this stood in the Holy Place, not in the Most Holy, as our text states (Exod. xxx. 1 ff.). The writer of our Epistle, living at a distance from Jerusalem, and gaining his knowledge of the arrangements of the Tabernacle from study of the Old Testament, appears to have been misled in this petty detail, from the table and the candlesticks, only, having been mentioned as the equipments of the Holy Place, in Exod. xxvi. 35, so that the position of the incense altar was left indeterminate, and was hence assigned, in our Epistle, to the Holy of Holies. In the Mosaic economy, the incense altar was of special importance on the day of Atonement, since it was on that day sprinkled with the blood which the high-priest had carried into the Holy of Holies (Exod. xxx. 10; Lev. xvi. 18 ff.). The Ark was found also in Solomon's Temple, but it was lost when that sanctuary was destroyed by the Chaldeans, and thus the second Temple was without it (1 Kings viii. 4; Jos. *Bell. Jud.* v. 5, 5). As to the pot of manna, the rod of Aaron, and the tables of the law (Exod. xvi. 32–34; Num. xvii. 10; Exod. xxv. 16; Deut. x. 5), the first two are said, in the sacred texts quoted, to have been laid up *before* the Ark, not *in* it, while the tables of the law are said in these texts to have been put into the Ark, but in others to have been set "before the Lord." That they were put into the Ark became the belief of the later rabbis. Respecting the cherubim, see Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," new edition, vol. iii. p. 457.

The typical significance of the two parts of the Tabernacle.

6. Now, these things having been thus prepared, the priests go into the first division of the tabernacle continually, performing the services appointed by God; 7. but into the second portion the high priest alone enters, once in the year, not without blood,[1] of the bullock just slain as a sin-offering, which he offers for himself, and for the errors of the people—that is, for their offences of ignorance or their sudden, unpremeditated offences:[2] 8. by which the Holy Ghost teaches, that the way into the true Holy Place, the Holy of Holies where God is throned in the heavens, not on earth, is not yet opened as long as the first, or outer half, of the tabernacle is still standing: that is—the Holy of Holies being entered only once a year, and that by no one but the high priest; the ordinary priesthood not passing beyond the outer part—the Holy Place—in their daily service; this outer half, thus, as it were, shutting off and closing from them, the inner Holy of Holies—God would teach us by this, that as long as the Levitical priesthood or the Mosaic law continued, there was no open approach to the direct presence of God, and that, therefore, to bring about such full and immediate access to God, for all men, the Old Testament covenant must be done away, and a nobler and more perfect one introduced by Christ. 9. Which is an emblem of the state of things at the

[1] Lev. xvi. 14.

[2] Those who sinned deliberately were to be cut off from the congregation (Exod. xii. 15, &c. &c. &c.). Those, only, who sinned unwittingly, or, as it were, unwillingly, could have atonement made for them, since, as our Epistle presently says, "It was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away *sins*" (Heb. ix. 7; x. 4). The word translated in our text "errors," is opposed to deliberate sins in the text just quoted. The former word (*ἀγνόημα*) occurs only once in the New Testament, and is used in the Greek Bible, in Genesis xliii. 12, for a Hebrew word which also occurs only once in the sacred text (מִשְׁגֶּה), and is rendered "oversight" in the Authorised and Revised Versions. The second word (*ἁμάρτια*) is the ordinary word for sin.

present time ; according to which are offered **outside** the **Holy** of Holies, **and thus in striking contrast to the immeasurably nobler ministration of Christ, in heaven, immediately before God**, both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as the conscience testifies, make the worshipper perfect, 10. being only,—including their meats and drinks, and various washings, **to go no farther**,—ordinances of the flesh imposed **by God** until a time of **making a** reformation, **by the introduction of a new and better dispensation by Christ.**

What the Mosaic **law** could not give is secured us by Christ.

11. But Christ, having come **as** a high priest of the good **things** yet future, **in the world of light**—passing **up** through the greater and more perfect tabernacle **of the visible heavens, which are, as it were, the outer part of the true heavenly tabernacle, beyond even this, its outer court, and are** not made with hands, that is to say, not of this lower creation, 12. entered, **not like the high priest of earth**, by virtue of the blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of His own blood, once for all, into the Holy Place **above—the true Holy of Holies, before God Himself**, having obtained eternal redemption.

His redemption is, indeed, eternal.

13. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify **so far as concerns** the cleanness of the flesh: 14. how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself **a lamb** without blemish, to God, cleanse, **not your flesh only**, but also your conscience, from **slavery to** dead works **of the Jewish law, turning you, instead,** to serve the living God.

To become the Mediator of this New Covenant Christ *must* suffer death. The blood of beasts sufficed to conse-

crate the earthly sanctuary, but a nobler offering was demanded for the consecration of the heavenly one, and this Christ has made, once for all; at this, the end of the world, by His sin-destroying death.

15. And for this reason is it that He is the mediator of a new covenant—that a death—His own—having taken place, for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, they who have been called to it by God, may receive the fulfilment of the promise of the eternal inheritance.

How this has such a result, and the necessity that Christ should die, to secure it.

16. For where there is a covenant, or, rather, testament, the death of him that made it must of necessity be shown. 17. For a testimony is of force only when it is that of the dead: for is it ever of force while he who made it still lives? 18. Hence, even the first—the Old Testament covenant, has not been initiated and made sacredly valid without blood. 19. For after every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people, according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book of the law itself, and all the people, 20. saying, *This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you.* 21. Still more, at a later time, when they were made, he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry in it, in the same way, with blood. 22. And, indeed, according to the law, I may almost say that all things are cleansed with blood, and that, without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

But if the earthly sanctuary needed thus to be consecrated and made effective for its end, by such means, the

heavenly sanctuary must have needed a far nobler offering and nobler blood. This, Christ has, once for all, presented before God, by His sin-destroying sacrificial death, and so complete is its efficacy, that those who wait for Him as heirs of salvation, at His return, will need no other offering to obtain it.

23. It was necessary, therefore, by the Mosaic law, that the Jewish copies of the "vessels of the service" in the true tabernacle,—the things in the heavens,—should be cleansed by these sprinklings of the blood of beasts; but the heavenly things themselves—the realities of these copies, with better sacrifices than these. 24. For Christ, as high priest, entered not into a Holy of Holies made with hands, the *copy* of the true one above; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the very face of God for us: 25. nor has He done so to come out again presently, like the high priest on earth—that He should offer Himself often on the Cross, and return again, to present this fresh outpouring of His blood—as the high priest does, who enters into the Holy of Holies, year by year, with blood not his own: 26. for, otherwise, He, Jesus, must have suffered often since the creation of the world: but now, once, at the close of the ages of the world, He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

The New Covenant thus ratified by the death of Christ has removed all the imperfections of the Old one, and no other is ever to be expected.

27. And in the same way as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this there is no repetition of dying, but only the judgment; 28. so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, will not die any more, but shall appear a second time, without anything to do with sin which has been blotted out, as respects His people, by His death—to them that wait for His coming, to save them.

As the constantly repeated atonements, under the Levitical Law, were powerless to save; the one all-sufficient atonement by Christ was necessary.

X. 1. For the law, having only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image or reality of them, casting this shadow, they who are its priests can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer year by year, in perpetuity, make them perfect who draw nigh the altar. to present sacrifices for themselves, as priests, and for the worshippers. 2. For if they had done so, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers once really cleansed, would have had no more self-accusation of sins? 3. But in these sacrifices there is, year by year, a recalling to mind of sins committed in each year. 4. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away deliberate sins.

Proof from Scripture of the worthlessness of such gross agencies to take sin away, and proof that this is secured, not by the blood of beasts, but by Christ having fulfilled the will of God by His atoning death. Christians have peace and pardon only because of this.

5. In harmony with this fact, when He, Christ, comes into the world at His incarnation, He says, speaking through the singer of one of the psalms,[1] *Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body didst Thou prepare for Me*; 6. *in whole burnt-offerings and sin-offerings Thou hadst no pleasure*: 7. *then said I, Lo, I am come: (In the roll of the book it is written of me)—to do Thy will, O God.*

In these quotations, that on which God sets no value is represented by Judaism; that which He honours, by Christianity.

[1] Ps. xl. 7, 8; l. 8–14; li. 16, 17.

8. After His saying, in the beginning of these verses, *Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt-offerings and sin offerings Thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure in them*—which still are all offered, in obedience to the law; 9. He then goes on to say, *Lo, I am come to do Thy will*, and thus He, God, does away with the first, that He may establish the second. 10. By which fulfilling of His will by the work of Christ, we have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.

Repetition of the essential difference between the Jewish high-priest and Christ.

11. And, indeed, as we have said, every priest stands, day by day in the temple, ministering, and offering, often times, the same sacrifices; sacrifices which can never take away sins: 12. but He, Christ, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins, the atoning worth of which lasts for ever,—the sacrifice of Himself, on the Cross,—sat down on the right hand of God; 13. waiting, from His doing so, till His enemies be made His footstool. 14. For by the one offering of His own blood, He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Scripture, further, proves that no more sacrifice for sin is needed.

15. And the Holy Ghost, also, witnesses to us to this effect: for after He, God, has said, 16. *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord* God; *I will put My laws on their heart*, as on fleshly tablets, instead of the stone tablets of Moses, *and upon their mind also will I write them.* Then he adds, 17. *And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*[1] 18. Now where remission or pardon of these our sins is, there is no more need of offering for sin.

[1] Jer. xxxi. 31–34.

Having such a glorious High-Priest, and all the blessedness He has procured for His people, they ought to hold fast and unwaveringly to their faith, stirring each other up at the thought of it, to love and good works, and not, as had come to be the way with some, forsaking the meetings of their brethren for worship; and this the more, as the Coming of Christ is at hand.

19. Since then, brethren, we have **ground for** assured confidence **as to entering** into the holy place, **above—the very presence-chamber of God**, through—**on the ground of**—the blood of Jesus **now offered by Him there**,—20. by the way **leading up to it**, which He has consecrated for us, **that is, on our behalf**—a new, **hitherto non-existent**, and living way, **leading, as it does, to eternal life**; **a way** through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; 21. and having a great high priest over the house of God, **the tabernacle in the heavens**; 22. let us draw near with a true heart, in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled **by the merits of Christ's atonement**, from **the weight of** an accusing conscience, and our bodies washed with **the** pure water **of Christian baptism**, as **theirs were with water, who entered the earthly tabernacle**:[1] 23. let us **further** hold fast the confession of the hope **we enjoy**, without letting it waver; for He, **God**, is faithful that promised: 24. and let us keep our eye on each other, to incite **them and ourselves**, to love and good works; 25. not forsaking our **Christian** assemblings, as is the custom of some; but encouraging **one another to attend them**; and **that** so much the more, as ye see, **in the troubles of Judæa, heralding the terrors of Roman vengeance**—the day **of Christ's Coming** drawing nigh.[2]

To forsake the Christian assemblings revealed a lukewarmness which might very easily lead to ultimate

[1] Exod. xxix. 4; xl. 12; Lev. viii. 6. [2] Matt. xxiv.

apostasy. Those who do so are therefore warned that any one deliberately contemning and sinning against the known Christian "confession," must inevitably expose himself to the punitive judgment of God.

26. For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth,—rejecting Christianity,—there remains no more a sacrifice for sins,—for Christ, whom ye have thus rejected, was offered once, for all time, 27. but only a certain and fearful prospect of judgment, and a divine indignation of flaming fire which shall devour the adversaries.[1] 28. Of this indeed, you may be sure, for He who has set at nought Moses' law dies without pity, on the testimony of two or three witnesses: 29. and of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be thought worthy, at Christ's coming who has, as it were, trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified, an unholy common thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace? 30. For we know Him who has said, *Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense*, and, again, *The Lord shall judge His people.*[2] 31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

Mindful of their former enthusiasm for Christianity, they must not give way to unworthy faintheartedness, but rather cling fondly to their confession, for Christ would soon return, bringing with Him the entrance on the promised inheritance of eternal bliss.

32. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, owning Christ as your Saviour, and

[1] 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

[2] Deut. xxxii. 35, 36; Ps. cxxxv. 14. The first quotation agrees neither with the Hebrew nor with the Greek Bible, but is closely like the words of Paul in Rom. xii. 19. Possibly both may have used the form of a proverb drawn from these texts.

casting in your lot with those who confessed His name, ye endured a great struggle with trials; 33. on the one hand, being made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches for being Christians, and by overt sufferings in body or goods; and, on the other, being partakers, by your sympathy, with them that were so used. 34. For ye both afforded sympathising help to them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your own possessions; knowing that ye yourselves have in heaven a better possession and an abiding one. 35. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which has such great recompence of reward. 36. For ye have need of patient endurance, that, having fulfilled the will of God, ye may receive the promise. 37. *For* the words will soon be fulfilled, *yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.* 38. *But My righteous one shall live by faith: and if he draw back, My soul has no pleasure in him.*[1] 39. But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that have faith, to the saving of the soul.

This "faith," which is thus the very essence of religion, is now defined, and then illustrated by a series of examples.

XI. 1. Now faith is the assurance as to what we hope for; the firm conviction as to things not seen. 2. For it was by

[1] This quotation is from the Greek version of Habakkuk ii. 3, 4, but it is a very free one. The Septuagint reads, "For the vision is yet for a time, and it shall shoot forth in the end, and not in vain: though He should tarry, wait for Him; for He will surely come, and will not tarry. If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him; but the just shall live by My faith." The Hebrew of the same verses in the Revised Version is as follows: "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth towards the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by His faith."

having such faith that the elders, your ancestors, had good witness borne to them in Scripture. 3. By faith, we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things that appear; God thus hiding His purposes from man, and demanding faith even here. 4. Through his faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, on account of which he had witness borne him that he was righteous, God Himself bearing witness to this, in His gifts being accepted: and on account of it, his faith, he, being dead, yet speaks. 5. On account of his faith, Enoch was translated, that he should not see death; and *he was not found, because God translated him:*[1] for before his translation he had witness borne to him in Scripture, while he was still alive, that he had been well pleasing to God.[2] 6. And his faith is thus shown, since without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him. 7. Through faith, Noah, being warned of God concerning things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household; by which act he condemned the unbelieving world, by the contrast of his faith to their unbelief, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. 8. Through faith, Abraham obeyed, when he was called by God to go out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, without knowing whither he was going. 9. Through faith he lived as only a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs, with him, of the same promise: 10. for he looked for the city which has the strong, eternal foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11. Through faith, also, Sarah, herself, received power to conceive seed when she was past age, because she counted Him faithful who had promised: 12. and hence, also, there sprang from one, Abraham, and that when he was as good as dead, so many as the stars

[1] Gen. v. 24. [2] Gen. v. 24.

of heaven in multitude, and as the sand on the sea-shore, innumerable.

13. All these, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, died true to their faith, not having received fulfilment of the promises, but having seen and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14. For they that say such things make it clear that they are seeking after a fatherland of their own. 15. And if, indeed, they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return to it. 16. But now, acting as they did, they show that they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: for which reason God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city.

17. Through faith, Abraham, being tried by God, offered up Isaac: yea, he who had gladly received the promises was about offering his only begotten son; 18. even he, indeed, was about doing so to whom it was said [1]—*In Isaac shall thy seed be called:* 19. accounting that God is able to raise him up, even from the dead; for which reason he, also, in a manner, received him back, from the dead. 20. Through faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau,[2] respecting things still future. 21. Through faith, Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.[3] 22. Through faith, Joseph, when his end was nigh,

[1] Gen. xxi. 12. [2] Gen. xxvii. 27 ff.

[3] In the Hebrew text, Jacob "bowed himself upon the bed's head" (Gen. xlvii. 31). Here, in the Epistle, the Septuagint Version is given, by the change of *mittah*, a bed, into *mattah*, a staff; a variation easy in Hebrew, from the want of any vowels in the manuscripts. But the Hebrew seems clearly the right version, for the patriarch had "strengthened himself, and sat upright on his bed" (Gen. xlviii. 2), and could thus readily bow down towards the lower end of it, in worship, as we are told David did (1 Kings i. 47). The staff has been fancied to have been that which he, like all sheiks, carried, as the sign of his rank, or as his shepherd's staff; but this is only, of course, supposition, nor is it easy to think how the sinking old man could turn and support himself on it, since he needed both his hands for the blessings he was about to give, or for

made mention of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt; and gave commandment concerning his bones.[1] 23. Through faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a goodly child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. 24. Through faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25. choosing rather to suffer ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26. accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he kept his eye steadfastly on the recompence of the reward hereafter. 27. Through faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. 28. Through faith he instituted the Passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the first-born should not touch them. 29. Through faith, they, the Israelites, passed through the Red Sea as over dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do, were swallowed up. 30. Through faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days. 31. Through faith, Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace. 32. And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David, and Samuel, and the prophets: 33. who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34. quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. 35. Women received back their dead raised to life again: and others let themselves be tortured, as by

the purpose of prayer. Bowing on his couch, moreover, was much more in keeping with Hebrew usage. The idea that he worshipped an image carved on the head of the staff, is surely extravagant in the case of one who buried even the earrings worn as amulets among the women of his tribe, to prevent idolatry in any shape (Gen. xxxv. 4). Philological reasons, indeed, show that the Septuagint reading is an error.

[1] Gen. l. 25.

burning, impaling, or being hewn in pieces, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: 36. and others had the trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: 37. they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted to deny the truth, they were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, maltreated; —38. of whom the world was not worthy—wandering in deserts, and mountains, and caves, and the holes of the earth. 39. And these all, though they had had witness borne to them, through their faith, did not receive the fulfilment of the promise, 40. God having provided some better thing as to us, that, apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

Having such examples, and above all, that of Jesus they should stand firm in the trials that might come on them, and regard their sufferings as a gracious chastisement, for their eternal good.

XII. 1. Therefore let us also, as well as the saints of the old covenant, thus famous—seeing we are compassed about, as it were, by them, as so great a cloud of witnesses to the priceless worth of fidelity to faith, lay aside every hindrance, as the runner in the games lays aside his dress, and let us put from us, especially, the sin of falling away from Christianity altogether, which in these times so readily clings round us, stopping our progress, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is set before us, 2. looking to Jesus for our imitation and encouragement—the author and perfecter of our faith, for He first kindled it in us, and He will bring it to final triumph, if we be true to Him—who for the joy that was set before Him, as the heavenly reward of His sufferings, endured the cross, despising shame, and has now sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3. For call to mind Him who has endured such opposition of sinners, to their own condemnation, that ye may not grow weary, and fainting in your souls

Their sufferings, as yet, have been comparatively light and they have been sent from God as a gracious chastisement.

4. Ye have not yet resisted to blood, striving against sin, 5. and ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons of God, *My Son, make not light of the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him*; 6. *for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*[1] 7. Ye endure all this for chastening, for, in allowing you thus to suffer, God, really, dealeth with you as with His sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not? 8. But if ye be without chastening, of which all God's children, as shown in the enumeration just given of Old Testament saints, have been partakers, then are ye bastards, and not His sons. 9. Furthermore, we had, when young, the fathers of our flesh who chastened us, and we gave them reverence although they did so: shall we not, then, much rather submit ourselves to the Father of our spirits, and live, through similar reverence? 10. For they, our earthly parents, verily, for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11. All chastening, indeed, seems, for the time, no ground of joy, but rather a matter of sorrow: yet, afterwards, it yields peace-bringing fruit of righteousness, to them who have been subject to its discipline. 12. Therefore, since what you may suffer proves you sons of God, and is for your good in the end, lift up the hands that hang down, and straighten the now feeble knees; 13. and make smooth, straight paths for your feet—the straight smooth paths of a true Christian example, that that which is as it were lame—any weak brother,—be not turned out of the way, but rather be strengthened and healed of his weakness, by keeping on in the only right and safe course.

Unity and holiness are the aims to be especially sought.

[1] Prov. iii. 11, 12, LXX., which varies somewhat from the Hebrew.

14. Follow earnestly after peace with all men, including non-Christians, and after holiness of life and spirit, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15. keeping a diligent outlook that no one of you come short of receiving, hereafter, the heavenly reward—the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness growing up cause trouble, and the many be defiled by it; 16. lest there appear among you any fornicator, or profane person, like Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright. 17. For ye know that, even when he, afterwards, desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected—for he found no room in Isaac's mind for repentance of his having by error given the blessing to Jacob, though he, Esau, sought it earnestly from him, with tears.

The New Covenant, through Christ, pledges all Christians to strive after ever higher spiritual life. The Old Covenant had its horizon on earth, appealed only to material hopes, and was enforced by the dread of penalties, but the New Covenant is spiritual and heavenly, brings us into communion with God and all the holy ones around Him, and secures forgiveness and eternal bliss.

18. For ye are not, like your forefathers, come unto a mount Sinai, that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19. and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which they that heard, intreated that no word more should be spoken to them. 20. For they could not endure that which was commanded,—*If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned.*[1] 21. And, indeed, so terrible was the sight, that even Moses said, *I exceedingly fear and quake.*[2] 22. But ye are come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23. to the general festal assembly and church, or gathering

[1] A free condensed quotation from Exod. xix. 12, 13.
[2] Exod. xix. 16.

of the first-born, who are entered on the citizen-roll in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24. and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling—the blood of Jesus,—that speaks better things than that of Abel—which cried for revenge, while that of Christ cries for pity and pardon. 25. See that ye refuse not Him, Jesus, that speaketh. For if they, your forefathers, escaped not when they refused him, Moses, who spoke for God, on earth, much more shall not we escape, who turn away to Judaism or sin, from Him that speaks for God from heaven: 26. whose voice,—God's—then, at Sinai, shook the earth, but who now has promised, saying, *Yet once more, will I make not only the earth, but also the heavens tremble.*[1] 27. But the expression, *Yet once more*, implies the removing of those things thus shaken, because they were only created things, and, as such, doomed to pass away, that those things that are not shaken may remain, being eternal and unchangeable. 28. Wherefore, we, receiving, as Christians, a share in a kingdom that cannot be shaken or changed, for ever, let us be gratefully thankful, that through this godly frame we may offer service to God well pleasing to Him, with fear and trembling, lest we fail to win His favour: 29. for our God is a consuming fire.

Closing exhortations.

XIII. 1. Let love of the brotherhood be abiding, 2 and do not forget to show love also to strangers; for, by doing so, some have entertained angels unawares. 3. Remember, by loving ministrations to them, those brethren who are in bonds, as if you were bound with them; and think of those who are ill treated, as being yourselves also in the body, and thus liable to the same fate. 4. Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. 5. Be ye free from the love of money, being content with what you have, for God Him-

[1] Haggai ii. 6, freely quoted and shortened.

self has said, *I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee.*[1] 6. So that we may with full confidence say, *The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what shall man do unto me?*[2]

7. Remember them that were your spiritual leaders and chiefs, and spoke to you the word of God; dwelling, in your thoughts, on the ending of their course by a martyr death; for so have already passed away your former heads, Stephen, James the elder, James the brother of our Lord, and Peter. Imitate their faith. 8. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, and hence His faith is unchangeable. 9. Be not therefore carried away by divers and strange teachings of the Judaisers; for it is good that the heart be stablished by God's grace; not by meats, that is, by the rites of the Jewish law, by which those who occupied themselves with them were not profited. 10. Nor do we need to go to the Jewish altar, for we ourselves have an altar,[3] of the sacrifice offered on which, they from among you have no right to eat, in the sacrificial feast that follows sacrifices, who worship God in the tabernacle—the Jewish temple—thus seeking spiritual safety in Jewish rites and service; and voluntarily abandoning Christianity. 11. For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the Holy of Holies by the high priest, as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp,[4] 12. and for this reason, Jesus, also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem; thus making a new and distinct altar, to which, as high priest of the new covenant, he brought His own blood, as to a new Holy of Holies; cutting off Christianity, thenceforth, from all communion with Judaism. 13. Let us Christians, therefore, go forth to Him outside the

[1] Gen. xxviii. 15; Deut. xxxi. 6, 8.

[2] Ps. xxvii. 1; lvi. 4, 11, 12; cxviii. 6.

[3] The altar of Christians is variously understood, as the cross on which Christ died, the Lord's table, and the Christian congregation, assembled for worship; but, to my mind, it is, clearly, THE CROSS.

[4] Lev. xvi. 27.

camp of the old Jewish system, bearing His reproach, heaped now on us for separating from Judaism. 14. For after all, we shall not have to bear it long, for we have not an abiding city here, in the earthly Jerusalem, but earnestly seek after that eternal city, the heavenly Jerusalem—which is to come. 15. Since, therefore, by Christ's once offering of Himself, for sin, we are sanctified before God, and need no more sacrifices, but have only to offer praise to God for redemption through Christ's blood, let us not go back to Jewish rites, but let us henceforth, through Him, Jesus, offer up a sacrifice of praise, the only sacrifice we now have to offer, to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, which make confession of our gratitude for His unspeakable gift, giving praise to His name. 16. But to do good to the brotherhood, and to share your earthly possessions with them, be not forgetful: for with *such* sacrifices God is well pleased. 17. Obey them that preside over you—the bench of "elders," as in a synagogue, and submit to them; for they watch for the good of your souls, as they that shall give account to the Lord, at His Coming; acting so that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this would be indeed unprofitable for you.

18. Pray for us;—that is, for him who writes this; for we know well that we have a good conscience in the teaching we give you—the teachings of Paul, to which you are at times inclined to demur—for we desire to live honestly in all things. 19. And I urge you the more earnestly to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.[1]

20. Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep, bearing with Him the blood of the eternal covenant—our Lord Jesus,—21. make you perfect in all that is good, to enable you to do His will; working in us, in me, as well as in you, all that is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22. But, I beseech you, brethren, bear with the word of

[1] He had, thus, been personally among them before.

exhortation: for I have written you only in few words, **so that you may bear with them the more easily.** 23. **Pray,** know that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.

24. Salute all your **spiritual** guides, **your presiding officers** and all the saints. They of Italy salute **you.**

25. Grace be with you all. Amen.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE THE STORM

THE little groups of Christians which gathered as "churches" or "meetings," in the poor half-lighted home of some humble disciple, in the narrow back lanes of Jerusalem, or of the towns, or villages, of Judæa, to hear the Epistle to the Hebrews read to them, at their Sunday or other assemblings, must have lived, in these years, amidst constant alarms. Taking no part in the wild eddying commotions of the times, they waited, with almost overpowering excitement, for the daily expected return of their Lord, to judge His enemies, and gather His "saints" from "the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other," to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They held their meetings in the night, for they belonged, as a rule, to the very poor, whose day was filled with sordid toil, and darkness was, besides, the only safety for such defenceless sheep, in the midst of ravening wolves; their very life depending on their attracting no notice.

The Jewish population, as a whole, were, meanwhile, paralysed by the state of affairs; the priestly aristocracy alone still labouring to avert the horrors which chronic insurrection was fast bringing on the nation. Having much to lose, and, as the educated class, having better knowledge of the power of Rome than the fanatical

multitude, they strained every nerve to arrest the revolutionary movement; even some of the Pharisees, so active till now as agitators, joining them. The terrors of war, so evidently imminent, at last alarmed even a section of this party, which, for many years, had hounded on the people to insurrection, and they would fain, when hopelessly too late, have exorcised the demon of popular fury they had evoked. Priest and Pharisee, alike, had continually, in these last years, alarmed the country by the cry that the Temple was in danger from the Romans, but, now, the high-priests summoned the multitude to its wide grounds, and implored them to go out and meet the cohorts of Rome, marching up with the procurator from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, with all friendliness, that they might thus abate anti-Jewish fierceness. Wild crowds of fanatics, day by day, declaimed against Rome in the great Temple grounds, but while, hitherto, the priests and Levites had stirred them up rather than calmed them, they now changed their tone, and came out in all the pomp of their festival robes, bearing the sacred vessels; the Temple harpers and singers, before them, filling the air with their chants and strains; and having thus gained the attention of the tumultuous thousands, prostrated themselves on the ground, while the high-priests implored all, for the sake of the city and Temple alike, to retire peaceably and do nothing to provoke the Romans. Standing in front of the lines of their prostrate imploring brethren, arrayed in all their pontifical magnificence, but with dust cast on their heads, and their inner vestment rent away from their bared breasts, in sign of the deepest mourning, they entreated the leaders of the city, and the people as a whole, not to rouse the worst passions of the

legions by refusing to salute them, as a token of loyalty; since their saluting them would bring peace, while their refusal would mean the ruin of the city.[1] But it had been easier to stir up sedition than it was to quiet it, so that, though some of the multitude, following the priests, went out to meet the soldiery, and saluted them as desired, the refusal of the cohorts to return the salutation was answered by loud cries against the procurator. A fierce charge of the foot-soldiers instantly scattered the seditious mob: the cavalry pursuing them through the narrow streets of the New Town, Bezetha, the part north-east of the Temple grounds; cutting down large numbers, while a still greater number were trampled to death in trying to escape.

Amidst such unspeakable tumult it seemed possible to the Romans to get into the Temple, and thus shut out the Jews from using it as a fortress against them; Florus aiding an attempt to do so, by bringing troops down from Herod's palace at the Jaffa gate. But the people, seeing this, crowded the flat housetops, and impeded the advance of the Romans by hurling every kind of missile on them from above, while others filled the Temple courts, and turned the Temple into an isolated fortress by tearing down the cloisters that joined-on to the castle Antonia, the Roman barracks in that part; their fierce, indomitable bravery forcing the procurator to abandon, for the time, the hope of getting possession of the Temple, and with it, of its treasures, which Florus, no doubt, would fain have made his own.

But in spite of this disaster, the heads of the nation would not give up all hope of still calming down the half-mad populace; Agrippa standing first among these

[1] *Bell. Jud.* ii. 15, 4.

prominent mediators. It was his aim, on the one hand, to pacify the people, and, on the other, to incline them to make concessions to the Romans, though, above all, he was anxious to convince the emperor that the only way to real peace was by restoring the house of Herod, in his person. There was, indeed, much to be said for his policy, for it had been proved by the reign of Agrippa I., that Judæa could be ruled peaceably, as a vassal state, without interference with its theocratic ideas. A friendly feeling towards the Herodian dynasty had, also, been created by Agrippa, and the fact that Agrippa II., his son, was already what we may call Minister of Public Worship, with all connected with the Temple and Temple-worship under his authority, promised to strengthen this kindly relation with the Jews. The supporters of the family were, moreover, increasing, for in proportion as the Pharisees drew back from the Zealots, and the men of action took the place of the rabbinical authorities, the sympathy of the whole Pharisee party inclined, more and more, to the dynasty whose last representative had organised the constitution according to their ideas. Unfortunately, the man to whom so many thus looked as the leader who would redeem Israel, was not equal to the task. The persistent blunders which he made in the choice of high-priests was ominous. He had appointed in the room of Hannas, the murderer of James, one Jesus, son of Damnæus, but he proved to be hostile to the Romans, and had to be set aside in favour of Jesus, son of Gamaliel. Anarchy, however, had already spread so widely that the priests objected to acknowledge this new head. The lower priests were determinedly against him and Hannas, with whom he closely allied himself, and whose dismal

fate he was afterwards to share. Both parties armed themselves, and the exercise of the high-priestly powers was made the subject of fierce streets-fights, in which the opposing priestly factions assailed each other with stones and clubs. Even Agrippa's own family were finally drawn into the struggle; two of the roughest bands of rioters being led by his cousins, Costobar and Saul, and it was only when Florus came to his aid, that Agrippa could overpower the disputants. Deposing his last high-priest, he now sought peace by installing Matthias, the son of Theophilus, a son of the Hannas, or Ananos, of the Gospels; the last of the roll of legitimately appointed high-priests, though the people, during the war, set up for themselves an irregularly chosen high-priest, Phanniel. Agrippa had thus appointed or deposed, in succession, six high-priests, while he had neither protected the lower grades of the priesthood, nor made the higher ranks his friends. To crown all, a great excitement rose against him immediately before the final actual opening of the war. To leave a permanent memorial of himself in the records of the Temple worship, he granted the Levites of the choir the priestly right to wear linen robes, and ordained that the Temple servants should learn the sacred chants; an innovation against which both priests and Pharisees rose in wild protest; predicting the destruction of the state for this insult to the Law.

But all that had happened was only the first drops of the gathering storm. A demand for a vast sum, to help Nero to pay for the great palaces he was building at Rome, roused Jewish fanaticism to the uttermost, though Judæa was only suffering in common with other provinces. The cry of "Corban, a gift (to God)," not to be touched

except for sacred uses, rose from thousands with wild fury, amidst savage shouts to defend the property of Jehovah from what was maintained to be the personal extortion of the procurator. Some, indeed, went so far as to go about with beggars' bowls through the town, to collect alms for such a poor mendicant. Infuriated at the insult, he instantly occupied Jerusalem with a strong force, and since the Sanhedrim could not pay down the money at once, he gave up the market of the higher town to plunder and crucified the prisoners taken, including some Jews of high position in the Roman service. Agrippa had gone to Egypt, to greet the new Egyptian procurator, but Berenice his sister remained behind in the city, and in one of her pious moods had taken the Nazarite vow, offering her shorn hair in the Temple. A deputation sent by the Sanhedrin to Florus having been refused an audience, she now set off, in her anxiety for her people, barefooted, in the garb of a supplicant, to the procurator, to entreat for clemency, but the insults of the soldiery made her flee back to the palace of the Hasmonæans, where she was staying, and there she spent the night in mortal fear, guarded by armed servants. The war may be said to have begun from this day: the 16th of May, 66.

Meanwhile the feud between the procurator and the Jews grew so much more embittered, that his superior, the Syrian Proconsul, at his wits' end, sent an official from Antioch to Jamnia on the Philistine plain, then a seaport, to meet Agrippa as he returned from Alexandria, and come with him to Jerusalem; the people going out eight miles from it, to greet the Roman dignitary. In Jerusalem itself, however, Agrippa and he had to bear

with all the wild excitement of Orientals; the multitude besieging the gates of the palace in huge crowds, raising loud unappeasable wailings and lamentings over the violence of Florus. But Agrippa still hoped that they might be calmed down by fine words, and turned from the lawlessness that had already almost roused the Proconsul against them. Summoning the populace, therefore, to the open colonnaded space known as the Xystus, on the west edge of what was then the valley dividing the Temple hill from the "upper city," and taking his stand, with his sister, on a balcony of the old palace of the Jewish Maccabean kings, close at hand, he harangued them in a long speech reported, more or less closely, by Josephus. Painting, with vivid eloquence, the awful power of Rome and the insane folly of rushing on death and national ruin by bringing about war with it, his harangue, which closed amidst his own tears and those of his sister, abated the storm for a time. The ruined portico of the Temple was rebuilt, and the Jewish authorities collected from the country at large, the forty talents deficient in the Roman tribute. But hostility to Florus was still so fierce that stones were thrown by some at Agrippa, and he was insulted as the betrayer of his country, for urging peace before it was settled who should succeed the procurator: an insult resented by the king's withdrawing to his own dominions, in the north.

Both sides were now exasperated. Eleazar, a son of Hannas the deposed high-priest, and grandson of the Hannas of the Gospels, a daring youth, took the mad step, as captain of the Temple, of ordering back the priests who were about to make the oblation presented daily for Cæsar. In vain the high-priests and the most

famous rabbis declared it unlawful to prevent any one from offering: in vain the oldest priests protested that such a thing was unprecedented. No single Levite could be found who would make the usual offering for the emperor. The high-priests could only send leading men to Florus and Agrippa, declaring their abhorrence of such proceedings.

But now, open insurrection blazed up in the south. Menahem, a son of the fiery Zealot and dauntless Maccabee, Judas the Gaulonite, who had given so much trouble many years before, having collected a large band, was able to seize the strong fortress of Masada, on the Dead Sea, murdering the Roman garrison. Herod the Great had stored up immense quantities of weapons and of war material in it, and thus the multitude were provided with arms. The Jewish priestly authorities, on hearing the appalling news, felt that decisive steps must at once be taken, and sent, asking both Florus and Agrippa to march troops to Jerusalem, to crush the rebellion while possible. This appeal, Agrippa, now finally separated from the populace, answered by sending 3000 horse, who occupied the upper town, to which the high-priests, and the higher classes of the citizens, had fled. The lower town was, meanwhile, seized by Menahem; between whom and Agrippa's men there was continual fighting. At last, on the day of the people bringing offerings of wood for the altar, Menahem, strengthened by a band of assassins, overpowered Agrippa's troops. The higher town was now given up to plunder; the palaces of Agrippa, of Berenice and of the high-priest Hannas burned down; the fury of the mob raging especially against Hannas—the hateful judge of Paul,—who had to conceal himself in an underground

sewer, from which, however, he was dragged out and pitilessly murdered, along with his brother Hezekiah.[1]

Menahem was now lord of Jerusalem, and, in royal robes, urged on his bands, from the Temple grounds, to attack the Romans in their castle, Antonia;[2] having already, by mining under the wall of the upper town, forced the troops of Agrippa to capitulate. The cohort left behind by Florus, was thus unable to hold Antonia, and retreated to the three castles—Hippicus, still standing near the Jaffa gate,—Phasael, and Mariamne; Menahem burning Antonia when thus abandoned, and demolishing the side of it next the Temple. Yet this triumph was not without its qualification, for, erelong, men bethought them that the Temple grounds were, by this change, made four-square, which, the rabbins had taught, foreboded the fall of the Temple, by transforming its grounds into the supposed shape of the heathen world. But the reign of Menahem was short, for the high-priestly or aristocratic party soon got over their first panic, and having rallied their followers, attacked him; that its leaders, who now were the younger Hannas and Eleazar, might rule in his place. Falling upon him as he was going up to the Temple, in royal purple, his party was scattered by the assailants, weary of the cruel despotism of this phantom king; Menahem himself being dragged out of a hiding-place on Ophel, and killed with every refinement of torture. Still there was no peace; Eleazar and his faction pressing on the struggle against the Romans, who, being unsupported from outside, were at last forced to surrender, on condition of their lives being spared. But with the faithlessness which marked Jews in their dealings with Gentiles,

[1] Jos. *Bell.* ii. 17, 6, 9. [2] *Bell.* ii. 17, 8.

the whole garrison no sooner laid down their arms, than they were massacred, with the exception of the tribune, who was spared on his promising to turn a Jew.

Hippicus, the so-called "David's Tower" of to-day. It is the only one of Herod's castles now standing.

(From a photograph by the Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett.)

Meanwhile, the fury of the non-Jewish population everywhere, at the monstrous doings of the Zealots, in Jerusalem and elsewhere, had resulted, far and near, in

an anti-Jew war; fiercely fought out on both sides. From Gaza, on the far south, to Ptolemais, and from Ascalon, on the sea-coast, to Pella, beyond the Jordan, the towns were turned to battlefields, till, as Josephus tells us, heaps of bodies of men, women, and children, lay rotting unburied, all over the land, while the Roman garrisons had their throats cut, wherever overcome. Nor was this civil war confined to Palestine or Syria: terrific tumults in Alexandria ending in 7000 troops being let loose on the local Jews, whom they well-nigh exterminated.

The Proconsul Cestius, forced at last to take vigorous action, now set out from Antioch with a body of legionaries and auxiliaries, horse and foot, over 20,000 in number; Agrippa accompanying him. Sweeping away all opposition in Galilee and the country north of Jerusalem, flames and death marking his progress, he had almost reached the Holy City towards the end of September. Eager to save his possible dominions, Agrippa once more tried to mediate, but the Jews rejected with scorn the overtures of one who was guide to the legions. His party in the city were able however, to help Cestius to get possession of the new town, which lay north-east of the Temple grounds, but he could not take the upper town or the Temple, though it seems that, had he persevered, they would both have been speedily surrendered. Yet, now, suddenly calling off his troops, he began a retreat, despairing of success, and only anxious to lead back his men safely to Cæsarea. But this he was not to effect. His rear had been greatly harassed by the Jews in his advance, but now they assailed him at once on the flanks and from behind. At last, as the legionaries descended towards the coast plains by the pass of Beth-

horon, so often fatal, in the past, to retreating armies,—the Jews assailed them with the utmost audacity from the steep sides of the descent, where cavalry could not act, till the whole force was thrown into confusion and fled as a mob rather than an organised force. At last, the fugitives who escaped slaughter reached Antipatris, where they were safe, but all the baggage of the army was lost; its military chest, its siege engines, the equivalent of our artillery, and its military train of all kinds; 5300 foot-soldiers and 380 cavalry having been killed, and a great multitude taken prisoners.

This sad reverse to the Roman arms was the signal for a fresh outburst of popular rage against the Jews, over the whole Syrian province, and also in Egypt. In Cæsarea alone, 20,000 Jews had fallen in the previous rising against them, 13,000 at Scythopolis or Beth-shean, 60,000 at Alexandria, and many thousands more, up and down the disturbed regions. But now, Jew-killing became fiercer than ever. Ten thousand were massacred in Damascus, and it was soon found by the hated race, that instead of sympathy in their mad fury against Rome, they had no friends whatever. Even their brethren of "The Dispersion" stood coldly aloof from them. A so-called Sanhedrim had organised itself in Jerusalem into a War Ministry, to prosecute the resistance to Rome, but the empire was, at last, thoroughly roused, and the disastrous and unnecessary retreat of the Syrian Proconsul, which had caused the destruction of the twelfth legion, was soon to be terribly avenged. Cestius was allowed to choose his own mode of death,[1] and Flavius Vespasian, with a great reputation won in

[1] Tac. *Hist.* v. 10.

Britain, was appointed commander-in-chief, and Licinius Mucianus as Proconsul of Syria; the one, noted as the sternest of soldiers, the other, as a man of wide and statesman-like qualities.

The condition of the Palestine Christians amidst such an upheaval of society may be conceived. Little could be done to spread the new faith, when men were everywhere in wild terror for their lives, or deaf to reason by a fanaticism which had blind faith in leaders who trusted to miracles for victory; daily expecting Jehovah to appear as their champion; leaders uniting with all this fanaticism an open sanction of murder and violence to gain their ends, and divided into hostile camps, which hated each other almost as bitterly as all hated the Roman.

Meanwhile, the insurrection in Palestine was viewed at Rome as a very serious matter. Peace with the Parthians had but recently been concluded; a fresh war was threatened in Gaul; a third still dragged itself on in Britain; the Germans showed themselves hostile; and a general rising against Nero was by no means impossible. The East, moreover, had always been so restive under the supremacy of Rome, that even those who knew the hatred of the Jews to the Syrian-Greeks and Arabs, hoped that the defeat of Cestius would lead to a union of these discordant elements. The leaders of the insurrection, themselves, counted on the Babylonian Jews coming, in mass, to their help, and to large contributions in money being sent them from the Dispersion throughout the empire; their expectations, being, perhaps, to a small extent realised. But the fate of the revolution was already determined by the spirit of its leaders for the time; those of the dignified class, being resolved to

keep such terms with the Romans, as would bring about a self-government of Judæa by one of the Herod dynasty, or by the chiefs of the Pharisee party, while those of the Zealots would have no relations with the heathen, and looked for the all-sufficient intervention of Jehovah, in behalf of His Temple and people. Traditional reverence for the heads of the priestly caste alone accounts for their being left to prepare for the impending war; for, though their position gave them a special knowledge of affairs and of the venerated Law, and though they were accustomed to command, they had neither heart nor capacity for the duties assigned them. Yet they made a show of activity at the outset, appointing generals to all the different districts under them, on both sides of the Jordan, and, among others, Josephus, to command in Galilee. This high post he owed to his being of illustrious priestly descent on his father's side, and connected with the royal Hasmonæan line on that of his mother; to his wide culture in all Jewish learning and his familiarity with even Greek literature; his successful management of some public affairs with which he had been entrusted, at Rome; and to the friendship of the high-priest Jesus, the son of Gamaliel. He had, besides, the advantage of youth, for he was not yet thirty at the time of his appointment.

On Josephus and Hannas now rested the fate of the country: the former controlling the destinies of the warlike north; the latter, those of Judæa. Hannas was a son of the Hannas of the Gospels and a true representative of the haughty and violent Sadducee party. In his brief high-priesthood of three months, he had made haste to stain his hands with the blood of James the Just and

other Christians, and he would, as his father's son, no doubt, fain have exterminated the new faith, had his reign continued. He next appears, as the associate of Ananias the son of Nebedai, the brutal judge of Paul, ruthlessly carrying out the heartless policy of the Sadducee priest-aristocracy, by grasping all the tithes for himself, leaving the lower orders of the priesthood literally to starve to death. The fate of the two was strangely contrasted, for Ananus was, erelong, we have seen, killed in the streets of Jerusalem, while Hannas became leader of the war-Sanhedrim. Next him in this strikingly composed ministry, was the former high-priest Jesus, son of Gamaliel, who during his reign had fought with Jesus, son of Damnai, for retention of his dignity.

Hannas at once, with his wonted energy, began the building of the city wall, in which he was largely aided by the gold taken from Cestius, now in the hands of Eleazar. In fact, he erelong betrayed his own party for its sake; the covetousness which made him detested by all the lower priesthood, in the end mastering even his better sense. The moderate party were disappointed by such over-zeal, but as the Zealots grew stronger, his old Sadducee spirit once more came out. To bestow offices out of the regular succession of the priestly courses was, he declared, unholy, and he began, along with Jesus, Ben Gamaliel, to exhort the people to preserve the Temple by making peace with the Romans. They, he now maintained, were the true friends of the Law, while the Zealots, he asserted, trampled it under foot. He even spoke of the Roman eagles as the symbol of true liberty and reverence for Jehovah.[1] Nor did he content himself

[1] *Bell.* iv. 3, 10, 12.

with words, but armed a force, and thus began the fearful civil war which tore Jerusalem in pieces, and in which he, with Jesus, Ben Gamaliel, met his well-merited end.

But, however grave the state of affairs might be in Jerusalem, the issue of the war depended on its fortunes in Galilee, which, bordering on Syria, was exposed to the first attack, but nevertheless madly thought that its being the richest, most warlike, and most populous district of Palestine, would suffice for victory. Galilee was indeed the mainstay of the revolt, for, apart from its resources, it secured a connection with the upper Euphrates, from which an army of volunteers was expected, while its own people were counted upon to rally in strong force to the help of Jerusalem. But the North, after all, was the weakest part of the country, for the Herods had not dared to build any fortresses along the Syrian border, and hence there was nothing to stop the march of the legions. Yet this supremely important region was handed over by the Sanhedrim, not to a tried and capable soldier, but to Josephus, a man under thirty, a hereditary priest who knew nothing of war, but had given his life to the ambitions of his order, the studies of the scribes, and the strict legalism of a rigid Pharisee. To make matters even more hopeless, instead of two soldiers as colleagues and advisers, he went to his command with two priests at his side.

As might have been expected, a commander so utterly unprepared for his charge was a conspicuous failure. He had never seen war and knew nothing about it, and though he boasts of knowing Greek enough to read it, yet not to speak it fluently, he excuses this half-knowledge of a language necessary for intercourse with the

non-Jewish world, by saying that the knowledge of languages was valued lightly by his people; those only being thought learned or "wise" who gave themselves up to the study of the Law, and understood it and the other Scriptures as the rabbis did. In this connection he remarks, as if to show his special claim to such a reputation, that as a boy of fourteen, he was already so famous for his attainments of this kind, that even high-priests and the first men of the city, came to him, asking his exposition of fundamental questions of doctrine. True to this supreme passion, he remained now, when Governor of Galilee, only a disguised rabbi, under whose military cloak there could be seen at his every movement, the robe of the Pharisee, with extra large tassels[1] and extra broad phylacteries.

Instead of organising the population, and securing alliances, this extraordinary generalissimo dreamed only of creating an ideal Pharisee community, though the Roman legions were already on the march against him. In imitation of the Mosaic body of Elders, he appointed a body of seventy elders in Galilee, carefully limiting their powers by the Mosaic model. In every town he further appointed a smaller group of seven men, who should decide any smaller matters; anything weighty needing, however, his judgment. The mansions of Tiberias were searched, not to see what contributions they might afford for defence, but whether there were in them any statues or decorations contrary to the second commandment, and he examined the storehouses in town and country, not to discover what stock of provisions they showed, but whether the oil in them

[1] Matt. xxiii. 5.

was Levitically pure, and prepared according to the directions of the Mosaic law.[1] His two priestly colleagues, meanwhile, were supremely concerned in the collection of the tithes, which had not been paid for many years, and when these had filled their pockets and made them suddenly rich, they asked leave to resign, and go back to their homes; Josephus having great trouble in persuading them to remain with him. Hating the Zealots, he enrolled troops from the substantial classes, and looked with contempt on the companies of young good-for-nothings raised by his local lieutenants, who soon saw his inefficiency, and acted for themselves. On the Sabbath, the forces were freed from duty and returned home. Such a ridiculous misconception of his duties infuriated the fanatical party, and erelong roused some of his local officers to open hostility. In Tarichæa he nearly perished, in a popular rising against him as a traitor. The city of Tiberias sent to Herod Agrippa, begging him to come and rule them for the Romans. Gischala was attacked, to put down the peace party. The land was torn by civil war, Josephus and his lieutenants fighting each other, even while the tread of the approaching legions might almost be heard. Hypocrisy, treachery, and thirst for blood, raged among these "soldiers of God," who pretended to fight for their religion. A public confession having been appointed in the synagogue at Tiberias, to own before God, that weapons, without Him, were of no avail, it was found that each faction tried to get the other to come unarmed, that they might thus cut them down; each discovering that those of the rival party near him

[1] *Bell.* ii. 21, 2; *Vita*, 13.

had armour and a dagger under their sackcloth mantle.[1] Still more, it was found that the "saints" who supplied the towns with oil, "pure and well pleasing to God," sold in them for ten drachmas what had cost them one. Worse than all, the most awful oaths, in the name of God, were no safeguard from the meanest treachery. In short, utter depravity and faithlessness reigned on every hand.

The end of such a state of affairs was not doubtful. Powerless to stop the huge force of 60,000 legionaries and auxiliaries, perfectly disciplined, who swept southwards, under Vespasian, crushing all opposition, Josephus found himself at last shut up in the strong town of Jotapata, with a besieging force round it, to which he had erelong to surrender, though he saved his own life by acutely declaring that a divine vision had revealed to him that Vespasian would be emperor. Received after a time into favour, he thenceforth broke off all connection with the revolution, and became a zealous Roman. Meanwhile, Mount Tabor on the plain of Esdraelon, Gerizim, Samaria, Joppa, and many other places, were stormed, and the invaders turned back to finish the war on the Lake of Galilee. Tiberias soon fell, and the fisher population of Tarichæa having taken to their boats, Vespasian built a rival fleet and utterly destroyed them; hundreds of rotting corpses being cast up on the beach for many days after. Presently, nothing hindered the march against Jerusalem. Its doom was near at hand.

I have been thus minute in sketching the state of things in Palestine up to the investment of the Holy City

[1] *Vita*, 56, 57.

by the Romans, that the tremendous difficulties in the way of Christianity, in those years, may be realised. The still small voice of our religion, which does not strive, or lift itself up in the streets, must have been well-nigh drowned in the din of revolutionary commotion. Men preoccupied with fanatical passion, full of a Mosaic millennium about to open, dreaming of the visible appearance of Jehovah, as the Leader of their hosts to world-wide empire, wild and demoniac in their hatred of all races except their own, as accursed of God from eternity—thinking this insane pride and malignity zeal for God and religion, though the most elementary morality had evaporated from their life and conduct,—could have no response in their hearts to the invitations of the humble preachers of the new faith, intensely unpopular as these obscure sectaries and their still more obscure and not numerous adherents must have been, from their passive indifference to the national hopes and aspirations, cherished with a frenzied enthusiasm by all Jews over the world.

Nor was the loyalty of the Christians themselves less jeopardised by the frightful political tempest of the times. We see, indeed, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, how sorely tempted many of them were, to renounce the new "Way" altogether, and go back to Judaism, and we may imagine how hard it was, amidst the scenes around them, for even the most loyal to cultivate those quiet and cloistered graces which Christianity demands. The spread of the "Faith," in short, must have been almost wholly arrested, and even the maintenance of the little churches imperilled.

It was under these circumstances that the book which stands last in the New Testament—The Revelation of St. John, the "Theologian," or "Divine"—was written. The

churches to which it was originally addressed were seven of those on the western side of Asia Minor; their moral, spiritual, and doctrinal corruptions being the subject of special animadversion in its opening chapter. But the Jewish element in the Christian community everywhere was then so potent, directly and indirectly, that the affairs of Palestine were of supreme interest to all the churches. The expectation of the Return of Christ was linked with the fate of Jerusalem, for He had, Himself, connected its fall with the revelation of the new Kingdom He was to set up.[1] That He was to come personally, in the clouds of heaven, to close the existing economy and introduce His Messianic kingdom, was a first article of faith, and every thing seemed to point to this as imminent. All that concerned the Holy City and the Holy Land, passed from mouth to mouth, with inexplicable rapidity, through the churches in all the provinces, to the utmost limits of the empire. Jerusalem, restored to inconceivable glory, was to be the metropolis of the new Kingdom of God, under the Messiah, their risen and exalted Lord, who would reign in it, over all the world. It was, indeed, the most sacred spot upon earth to Jew and Christian alike, as the seat of that Temple, in whose Holy of Holies, Jehovah sat throned between the cherubim, as the Almighty Guardian of His people, and of the sacred edifice itself, which even the Christians fondly believed, in the face of Christ's words, would survive, uninjured, whatever ruin might overtake the city. Nor was the anticipated fate of heathen Rome less eagerly in the thoughts of both Jews and Christians, in all parts; the impending judgments of God on it for its Sodom-like iniquity being expected by the latter to accompany

[1] Matt. xxiv., xxv.

or even precede the descent of Christ from heaven, while the Jew looked as confidently for the appearance of his own Messiah, to overthrow and destroy it. But the simplicity and spirituality of the churches, as we have seen in the Epistles of Paul and Peter, had sadly decayed, amidst this unhealthy excitement; wild and even immoral teaching having spread so widely, at least in the churches of Lesser Asia, as to threaten their very existence as Christian communities, and, to expose the guilty to disastrous judgments at the coming of Christ, before whose presence they could not hope to stand, unless they repented and returned to their first works. The lessons of the Apocalyptic writing now sent them, to calm their natural cravings for light on the immediate future, and to rouse them to a purer faith and a worthier life in anticipation of Christ's speedy coming, are the engrossing subject of our next chapters.

APTER VI

AFTER THE DEATH OF NERO

It is a curious fact that Nero was popular with the mob, even after his death; so little weight had his crimes and vices with the debased proletariat of Rome. He might be execrated, as he deserved, by all men of principle and respectability, but the populace clung fondly to his memory; some doubtless from instinctive loyalty to the last of the Cæsars, who, amidst all his faults, had not been without showy qualities; others, simply because no one had ever gratified them so lavishly with the spectacles in which they delighted. His democratic familiarity with the million had, besides, won him favour, for had he not been seen mingling in the crowd; sitting down with them at meals; eating, like them, in the theatre? And had he not hated the Senate, and the nobles, who were so haughty and contemptuous towards the masses? The boon companions who had surrounded him were at least courteous. His guards remained permanently fond of him, and for a long time, his tomb was constantly decorated with fresh flowers, and his bust set up on the rostra in the forum, by unknown hands.[1] Otho and Vitellius both made him their model, to win favour with the Romans, and for a generation men eagerly dreamed he was still alive, and would come back again to his own.

[1] Sueton. "Nero," 20, 22, 56, 57; Tac. *Hist.*, i. 4, 5, 16, 78; ii. 95

His known visionary talk of going to Syria and Egypt, and there enacting the Oriental sultan, had, indeed, prepared the way for this fancy, even while he was alive. It was hard to believe that the divine race of Julius had passed so suddenly and so secretly away. The witnesses of his death were few in number. Only three women devoted to him had concerned themselves with his burial. Icelus was almost the only one who had seen his corpse. It was easy to think that some other body had been called his. Some maintained that his remains had never been found; others affirmed that the stab in his throat had been bandaged and healed. The belief thus spread, that he had fled to Parthia, or to Armenia, the king of which he had fêted in A.D. 66. There, he was plotting a restoration, and would soon return, at the head of the dreaded cavalry of the East, to take revenge on his enemies. His statues began to be raised again, and even edicts were published in his name.[1] To the Christians all this was an abiding terror, for they looked on the dead emperor as the monster he really was. Nor was their alarm lessened by the fact that several false Neros appeared at intervals, keeping up the illusion that he would indeed return.

Meanwhile troubles in the empire increased. Gaul, under Vindex, had revolted, to the high delight of all Jews and Christians, who supposed that the empire would now disappear with the last of the Cæsars, and that Galba, the consul in Spain, who had been hailed there as emperor by his soldiers, and Vitellius, who was shortly after acclaimed by his troops to the same perilous honour in Germany, would be content to be independent rulers

[1] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 8; Sueton. "Nero," 13, 30, 47, 57.

in these two provinces. In Judæa, the Gaulish rising was welcomed as the counterpart of their own, but nothing could be more groundless. Judæa alone wished to break up the mighty federation which ensured peace and prosperity to the world at large. All the lands bordering the Mediterranean, once enemies, were only too glad to live as one great brotherhood. Even Gaul only wished the overthrow of unworthy emperors, and some necessary reforms. There was nothing in the Roman system resembling the personal characteristics of Oriental empires, which had accustomed the Jews to see nations, subjugated for a time, become once more separate states on the death of the supreme ruler, as had so often happened in Assyria, Babylon, and Parthia, and as had followed the death of Alexander.

But the dreadful excitement of the times was long in subsiding. A year and a half passed before the rival competitors for Nero's place had given way to Vespasian, the founder of the Flavian dynasty. The whole empire was in breathless unrest. The better classes at Rome still trembled at the recollection of Nero; Judæa was mad with fanaticism; the Christians everywhere cowered at the thought of the awful slaughter of their brethren, in the great massacre of A.D. 64, and the very earth, as if in sympathy, appeared to be torn by unwonted convulsions. To understand the Apocalypse, this phenomenal state of things, affecting the minds of all men, must be remembered.

In the interregnum between Nero and Vespasian, from which the Apocalypse dates, the portents which so greatly move superstitious ages like those of antiquity, were exceptionally strange and numerous. Something mysterious

seemed in the air. The interpretation of omens was a brisk trade in those days; many Jews, Syrians, and other children of Western Asia, and also many Egyptians, choosing this easy way of plundering the ignorant. Nor did even the higher classes disdain to seek their worthless help; for Babilus, the astrologer, had been in fatally high favour with Nero, while Otho and Vitellius were wholly under the influence of such designing charlatans, and even Vespasian allowed one to make show of casting out a devil before him.[1] Monstrous births were regarded as weighty indications of the future: one which had two heads being supposed to indicate a different emperor by each of them, and a pig said to have been farrowed with the claws of a hawk was held a perfect symbol of Nero.[2] Meteors and other signs in the sky made men hold their breath; for in ages when all motion was thought to indicate life, everything in nature, from the grass to the stars, was regarded either as presided over by some special divinity, of whose purposes towards men it might be made to give indications, or, among Jews and Christians, as having an angel of its own, who was used by God to reveal the future through it. Thus, in the Book of Enoch, we have angels for each department of creation, just as, among polytheistic nations, we have gods and goddesses of higher and lower grades, inhabiting the rivers, the seas, the trees, the air, the clouds, the stars; acting indeed as personifications of all these, and of every other phenomenon of nature. All around, men saw the mysterious principle of life springing forth from the womb,

[1] Sueton. "Nero," 36, 40, 46; "Otho," 4, 6, 7, 8; "Vitellius," 14; "Vespasian," 5, 7, 23; "Hours with the Bible," *Gospels*, 202.

[2] Tac. *Annal.* xii. 64.

the egg, or the seed, and hence, among barbarous races, even each plant had its spirit. Every page in the classics discloses the abject fear in which imaginary "signs" in the most trivial incidents of everyday existence held men of all ranks, awed by such fancies. Hence such appearances as falling stars, comets, and eclipses, were supposed to note the fate of nations and of kings. In the aurora borealis, men saw crowns, swords, and blood; the clouds took the form, in the heated imagination, of battles and warlike hosts, or of divine or monstrous forms. Bloody rain, rivers flowing back or turned to blood, and terrible results of thunderbolts, were the themes of frequent rumour. In the feverish times after Nero's death, all these, and countless other incidents, to which we should now attach no suspicion of ominous import, agitated the world at large.

Nor was it strange, in such a superstitious age. Civil wars raged. In Gaul the destruction of life was terrible. In Galilee, there was a war almost of extermination. In Northern Italy, the fields where Otho and Vitellius were successively crushed, long smelt of slaughter. The hideous massacres of the prisoners taken in these victories, forced, as they were, to fight, by thousands, in the amphitheatres, for the amusement of the populace, were appalling. The predictions of Christ as to wars and rumours of wars, and wonders in nature, as the heralds of His return, thus apparently realised, could not fail to engross the thoughts of the trembling Christians of all parts.[1]

Famine added its horrors to all the rest. In the year 68 the corn supply from Alexandria came short of the wants of Rome, and in the spring of 69 there was a great

[1] Matt. xxiv. 6–8; Mark xiii. 7–9; Luke xxi. 9–11.

inundation of the lower city, from the Tiber. In 65 came a terrible pestilence; thirty thousand dying in the autumn alone. In the same year, Lyons was almost burned down, and Campania was devastated by waterspouts and cyclones, to the very gates of Rome. A sudden irruption of the sea, a little later, covered Lycia with lamentation. As in the fourteenth century of our own era—that of the Black Death—the course of nature seemed to be wholly disordered. To use the words of Seneca, "The world itself was shaken, and the fear and even consternation of all men was intense." [1]

Unprecedented volcanic and seismic phenomena, moreover, filled the cup of trembling to overflow. Vesuvius, which was soon to break out in its awful eruption of 79, showed signs of unwonted activity for years before. In February A.D. 63 Pompeii was almost swallowed up by an earthquake; a great part of the population hesitating to go back to their shattered homes. The groups of small craters in the region known as the Phlegrean Fields, west of Naples, were smoking. Everywhere round Naples, the volcanic district still marked by the Solfatara, the Acherusian Lake, and many small extinct volcanoes, was a terror to an age which looked on hot springs, gaping cracks, huge caverns, deadly fumes of miasma, hollow subterranean sounds, or gaseous and sulphurous exhalations, as signs of the infernal kingdoms being underneath. The Jew or the Christian who landed at Puteoli, on his way to Rome, thought he saw the mouth of hell in this region, which even its own people regarded as veiling the terrors of the lower world. Its fumes rising from the soil, its constant quiver-

[1] Suet. "Nero," 39, 45; "Otho," 8; Tacit. *Ann.* xii. 43; xvi. 13; xv. 37; Seneca, *Quæst. Nat.* vi. 1.

ing, and above all, the flaming gases and hollow footing of the Solfatara, with its caves steaming and smoking, and its scalding mineral beds within them, were, in the eyes of the Hebrew, the very throat of the abyss, to be compared only to the horrors which had burst out at Sodom and Gomorrha, in judgment on the iniquities of the Canaanites. Nor could such a landscape fail to be reflected in visions like those of their apocalyptic literature.

When, moreover, the Jew or the Christian turned to the morals of the local population, his horror would intensify the gloomiest forebodings. Baiæ, famous for its hot springs, and as the fashionable watering-place of Rome, lived only for pleasure and dissipation. It and the other towns round the Gulf of Naples were, indeed, the very hotbeds of folly, crime, and debauchery. The waters of the Gulf of Baiæ had seen the insane freak of Caligula's bridge over them, with its scenic displays of military processions, and they hid under their soft blue the corpses of countless victims slain in the naval battles ordered by that emperor and by Claudius, as an item in the programme of their fêtes. No wonder that the Book of Enoch should say [1] that "the fallen angels live in a subterranean valley, in the West, near the mountain of metals" (Vesuvius), "which is filled with waves of fire; exhales the stench of sulphur, sends forth boiling sulphurous springs (—the thermal waters—) which cure diseases, and beside which the kings of the earth give themselves up to all forms of indulgence." It may be, indeed, that the hot springs of Callirrhöe on the Dead Sea, and the Valley of Hinnom at Jerusalem, were primarily intended by this picture of natural horrors, but "the mountain in the West"

[1] Book of Enoch lxvii. 4–13.

seems rather to point to Italy. Nothing could have been grander than the mansions and villas in the neighbourhood of Naples, or the public baths, the elaborate rock excavations for which, one still sees in the so-called baths of Nero, on the road to Pozzuoli. That we should find imagery in the Apocalypse, suggested by such a locality and such accessories to it, is natural, in an age when Jews moved from land to land, incessantly. To the Christian moralist, men, as before the Flood, were madly blind to the signs of the wrath preparing for them, or, like the people of the doomed Cities of the Plain, were revelling in vice, over the very flames of the pit which was to yawn for them, and swallow them up for ever.

But Italy was not the only land visited, in those years, by extraordinary physical convulsions. Asia Minor was shaken by repeated earthquakes, causing constant rebuilding of its cities, more or less entirely. Tralles, on the great eastern road from Ephesus, had to learn to make its houses mutually support each other: so frequent were the subsidences of the ground. In the year 17, fourteen towns had been destroyed in the district east of Ephesus, between the mountain ranges Tmolus and Messogis, both of which run west, almost to the once great city. There had never before been such a catastrophe; its appalling magnitude not only leading Tiberius to give direct assistance to the ruined communities, but calling forth the active liberality of the empire at large. Philadelphia, the seat of one of the seven churches—on the north-east slopes of Tmolus, and less than thirty miles south-east of Sardis, the seat of another of the seven—was exceptionally subject to earthquake shocks; often very severe. From the year 59, almost each year had been marked by some

disaster. The valley of the Lycus, which opens into that of the Meander, through which the great eastern road stretched under the shadow of its glorious mountains, was the focus of terrible seismic activity; the two cities of Laodicea and Colossæ, looking towards each other across the valley, being overwhelmed in the year 60; the latter remaining comparatively ruined; though the former had become, once more, rich and splendid, ten years after, when one of the seven epistles was addressed to the church in it. The limited triangle in which these communities were to be found—about eighty miles from Ephesus in the south, to Pergamos in the north, and only about twenty miles wider along its base—east and west—between Ephesus and Laodicea,—was not more than one hundred and forty on its third side, from south-east to north-west. This region of glorious hills, lofty shadowy mountains, and sweeping valleys of passing fertility and beauty, watered by many streams—a very paradise for climate and loveliness,—was, in the years when the Apocalypse was written, the scene of constant and often appalling convulsions of nature. Can it be doubted that the Christian population, and the writer of the Apocalypse himself, in an age which saw the finger of God in every incident in the heavens or earth, would view these awful phenomena, as designed by Him to rouse His people and warn His enemies, or that they would colour their thoughts and blend with their visions and forebodings? It seemed as if the world at large were in travail, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Greece, Asia Minor, and Italy, sent news, ever and anon, of additional calamities. One day, the island of Thera, seventy miles north of Crete, burst out into continued volcanic eruptions; on

another, they heard that Antioch in Syria was unremittently shaken by earthquakes. Everything seemed to speak of the approaching descent of the Lord in fiery clouds, to take vengeance on a guilty world, and to found His new unsuffering kingdom, in a regenerated earth canopied by new heavens. If even St. Paul was fain to cry "Maranatha"—"Our Lord comes," how much more would this be the thought of the poor and oppressed Christians, living in such a disjointed and godless time!

The excitement in the half-Oriental churches of Asia Minor was even greater than elsewhere, from the constitutional temperament of such a population. Colossæ, to which St. Paul had sent an epistle nearly twenty years before, had been shattered by the earthquake of the year 60, by which Laodicea, on the other side of the valley of the Lycus, had been almost as sorely injured. But there was a third city, Hierapolis, on the same side of the valley as Laodicea, and in sight of it, which, though standing in the midst of a strangely volcanic centre, had apparently escaped untouched.[1] Thither, we may suppose, the brethren at Colossæ betook themselves, when their town was overthrown. Indeed, if the catastrophe was like one of which I saw the results at Scio, twelve years ago, a population too poor, it would seem, or too alarmed, to rebuild their homes, would be glad to move to such a refuge as Hierapolis offered. Inscriptions still existing strengthen the belief that both they and the local Jews settled there, for we read in these, of annual distributions to workmen's unions, at the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" and at the "Feast of Pentecost." Nor do charitable in-

[1] For a description of Colossæ and Hierapolis see Geikie's "St. Paul," in "Hours with the Bible," New Testament Series, vol. ii. 398 ff., 417.

stitutions, mutual help associations in the different trades, orphanages, crèches for taking charge of children when their mothers were out at work, appear to have been anywhere so numerous or flourishing, though Philadelphia also abounded in these kindly organisations.[1] Yet guilds of workmen like those of our Middle Ages, were a prominent feature in the social life of nearly all the rich cities of "Asia" and of Phrygia, so that their existence does not necessarily prove the presence of Jews or Christians. Striking to say, by the way, even slaves were gladly welcomed into these fraternities, so that there was something of recognised human brotherhood, even in these times, outside the Christian fold. Indeed, Hierapolis boasted of being the birthplace of the slave Epictetus, a grown man when the Apocalypse was written, and famous for ever as a lofty moralist, though a pagan.[1]

But whether the refuge of the Colossians or not, Hierapolis had the special honour of being the home of one who had seen our Lord—the deacon, or perhaps we might call him, the Apostle Philip, since the Philip of Hierapolis is said to have had four daughters who prophesied, which is told us also of the Philip of the Acts,[3] while it is difficult to suppose that the Apostle Philip[4] could have been thus favoured as well, and equally so to imagine that the Philip of Hierapolis should have been honoured as one of the apostles, as he undoubtedly was, if he had been only a deacon. One of the four daughters appears to have died before Philip removed from Cæsarea to Asia Minor, but two of the others remained unmarried and died in ex-

[1] See facts and references in Renan's *L'Antechrist*, 340.
[2] See Geikie's "St. Paul," vol. ii. 417.
[3] Acts xxi. 9. [4] Matt. x. 3.

treme old age, while the third became a wife, and died at Ephesus. Almost all we know of the family is told us by Eusebius,[1] though some traditions are found elsewhere. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis about the year 139, had met the daughters, who all prophesied, and though he did not see Philip, he learned much from these ladies respecting him and the other Apostles, and their apostolic contemporaries. They especially spoke of Joseph, known better as Barnabas, saying that he had drunk poison without suffering any evil effects. Miracles, indeed, were habitually wrought, they said, by their father, and they even spoke of having seen a person raised from the dead by him. That St. John, also, settled in "Asia" is an accepted tradition, but he could only have come to it after St. Paul had finally left it, else there would assuredly have been allusions to the beloved disciple, by the Apostle of the Gentiles, in one or other of his Epistles.[1]

The troubles in Judæa, driving out all who could leave the country, added to the already large number of Jews in the rich district of Asia Minor which was the seat of the seven churches, bringing, also, no doubt, some increase to the number of local Christians. Among these may well have been the future author of the Apocalypse, for it is exceptional for its rabbinical learning, though the purity of its Greek would seem to mark it as the production of one born among a Greek-speaking population, and moving in a circle able to give him a liberal education. But there is nothing to prevent our thinking of a foreign-born Jew, brought up in Western Asia, and thus learning Greek idiomatically, in the rheto-

[1] Euseb. iii. 30, 31, 34, 37, 39; v. 17, 24.
[2] Euseb. iii. 23.

rical schools of Smyrna and Pergamos—being sent, like Paul, to Jerusalem, and there becoming, also like him, an accomplished rabbi, though afterwards embracing Jewish-Christianity; the Apocalypse showing that its author was as strongly Jewish in his sympathies, as St. Paul, in matters of ritual, was the opposite.

Under the leading of such apostles and apostolic men, the churches founded by St. Paul or his co-workers,—with others, perhaps, founded by men more of the Jewish-Christian section,—kept on their course, not without abundant trouble from outside, and amidst decay as well as advance in spiritual life. Doubtless the disputes of the two great parties, of conservative and liberal tendencies, that is, of Judaisers and those who followed the teachings of St. Paul in reference to the Mosaic law, were, at times, only too keen and bitter; for theological differences, however small or unessential, kindle passions as fierce as they are unworthy. Things had long been very trying to the Christians, but as years passed, they had greatly changed for the worse. In earlier days, their relations with the imperial authorities had been marked by a contemptuous toleration, except when they might be dragged before the courts on some charge of breaking the peace, raised against them by the Jews. But a wide-spread hatred of Christianity had gradually sprung up among the great heathen population of all classes, mainly from its protest against not a few of the most cherished usages and public and private amusements of the heathen life around. They had, in fact, come to be spoken of as the enemies of the human race—that is, of the Roman world; all outside which were of no account, as being only barbarians, or enemies. They

were, further, charged with disturbing society, and introducing notions which threatened to undermine it, with causing divisions in families, setting children against parents, and parents against children, and with bringing this about by abhorred and illegal magical arts; the hideous punishments inflicted on them by Nero being those appointed for the practice of such spells and rites.[1] These infamous practices, it was further held, the Christians carried out, in order to commit more safely specially abominable crimes. Such vague charges were necessarily, in a time of such excitement, very easily believed. That the Christians shunned the circus and the theatre, that they spoke of idols as evil demons, and held aloof from the thousand recognitions of the popular religion in public and private feasts, processions, and much else, was enough to make them be abhorred, as conspirators against the society of the day, and against the empire itself, with which these customs were bound up. Yet the only explanation of these appalling charges, then offered by their enemies, is to the credit of Christianity; for it came to be supposed that a religion which wrought such a wonderful reformation in its followers, and kindled in them such an enthusiasm and loyalty to their faith, must, after all, be inspired, at bottom, by the powers of evil, bringing about these spiritual changes by the influence of unholy diabolic arts. The heathen, like the Pharisees, could not deny that devils were cast out, but, like them, gave Beelzebub the credit.

[1] Ramsay quotes a sentence of Paullus which states that those guilty of magic arts were to suffer the extremest penalties, that is, to be thrown to the beasts, or crucified: the "magi" themselves being burned alive.—Ramsay's "Church in the Roman Empire," 236.

From all this we may be sure that the number of Christians who openly professed, and perhaps taught their faith, in their simple way, would be much below that of those who, like Nicodemus, for fear of those round them, kept their belief secret, showing no difference, in ordinary matters, from the daily life of their neighbours. The limits permissible in conforming to the usages of a society the very weft and woof of which were pagan, was, from the first, a question of great delicacy; for to stand out against every appearance of recognising idolatry would have meant shutting themselves out of the world entirely. Such Christians, moreover, as avoided rousing the irritation of their heathen neighbours, by their zeal, would be less likely to be swept into the net of persecution than their bolder brethren, and thus the number who lived undisturbed may have been greater than we suppose.

The hostile action against the new faith introduced by Nero, to cover his own infamy in connection with the burning of Rome, would thus have a fancied ground of being permanently adopted, on the supposition only too widely held, that the safety of society demanded its suppression, and this principle would necessarily form a precedent on which the prefect of the City, and, erelong, the governors of all the provinces, would feel bound to act. Christians were "criminals," and to be punished as such: indeed, the days were rapidly coming when they would be treated as mere outlaws—because they believed on the abhorred "Name." The "faith" had, apparently, been spread, at first, in Asia Minor, and perhaps over the West generally, without exciting any public opposition. But, what with the tumults raised by the Jews; the ill-will of tradesmen whose business it injured, and the resentment of families

at the conversion of some of their members, a feeling of general detestation gradually sprang up, which was only too ready to avail itself of the new attitude of Nero towards Christianity, assumed for personal reasons.

The organised unity of the new religion, which made it, in a measure, an empire within the empire, was, no doubt, erelong, added to the reasons for imperial action against it; even the Jews, though greatly favoured so long as Rome saw in them only a unique nationality and faith, being proscribed as soon as their insurrection had shown how dangerous they were when acting together. To break up their combination, indeed, Titus meditated the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the building in its place of a temple to Jupiter; collecting, for this end, the voluntary tax till then paid by all Jews for the support of their own sanctuary.

When the Apocalypse was written, the fixed policy of the empire had led to open persecution of the Christians, even to the length of putting some of them to death.[1] The scene of the book, as I have said, is laid wholly in the region of the seven churches; Rome being mentioned only as the distant centre, to which, as Mommsen shows, the martyrs were sent, to undergo the violent death to which they had been condemned; the imperial city thus becoming meetly symbolised, as "the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses of Jesus."[2] There must indeed, even already, have been a severe and widespread persecution, in which numbers died simply for "the Name;" no specific charge of crime being alleged against them: many passages in the Apocalypse indicating this, and showing that this "tribulation" was no passing blast,

[1] Rev. ii. 13. [2] Rev. xvii. 6.

but had become chronic.[1] The martyrs in these evil times suffered, we are told, as witnesses to "the Name;" not as guilty of alleged crimes. The real persecutor, moreover, is clearly indicated, by its being implied that he is worshipped as a god, by "all that dwell upon the earth"—a phrase equivalent to the Roman Empire, which embraced virtually the whole known world. The Christians alone did not worship him.[2] The martyrs, moreover, we are told, were put to death because they did not worship the Beast—that is, the Roman emperor.[3] Their refusal to pay religious homage to him, and their faithfulness to their own God, are treated as parts of one act; the worship of the emperor being the test, non-compliance with which implied fidelity to Christ. Rome and the Church were, in fact, to the Christians, irreconcilable opposites; the imperial system being regarded by them as the incarnation of all evil, and the settled foe of the churches, bent on stamping out Christianity altogether. No wish for compromise with it is hinted. The only cry is to be avenged. Nor is any hope entertained of winning it over to milder ideas respecting the new faith. The conviction, moreover, is not concealed, that Christianity was destined to be supreme over all the world, under the Messiah, now at hand; the existing state of things being then swept away in flaming fire; and the expectation of the fall of the empire, implied in such anticipations, must have seemed enough, in itself, to justify any measures of repression.

This confidently-expected near overthrow of Rome was, indeed, and had been as early as the time when Paul

[1] Rev. vi. 9, 11; vii. 14; xii. 11; xiii. 15; xvi. 6; xvii. 6; xviii. 24; xx. 4, &c. [2] Rev. xiii. 8. [3] Rev. xiii. 15.

wrote to the Thessalonians, the engrossing subject of all Christians everywhere; all the letters of the apostles to the various churches, and the Apocalypse itself, being strongly coloured by it. That the Lord was at hand was doubted by none, and the accursed "man of sin" would assuredly perish in the furnace-glow of His wrath, when He appeared; all things, over and around, would then pass away, and a new earth would be canopied by new skies. This was believed to be infallibly foreshadowed by multiplied signs in nature, and by the course of events everywhere. The awful experience of 64, when such a multitude of their brethren had perished in "the great tribulation" under Nero, after the burning of Rome, had changed the feelings of the survivors from the passive submission to the existing imperial government, preached by SS. Peter and Paul, into a more or less active resistance to whatever, in the demands of the State, seemed to involve recognition of idolatry. St. Paul, under Nero, had said that the powers that be are ordained of God, and St. Peter had required that the Christian should submit himself to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake,[1] but the sight in every city of Asia Minor, of the worship of the emperors as gods, even when they were such monsters as Caligula and Nero, spread through all the Christian communities a profound conviction that power, among the heathen, was from the devil, not from God. The worship of the reigning emperor, with its associated public games and spectacles, was the great yearly festival over all Lesser Asia. To be at the expense of these costly rejoicings as the "Asiarch," was the highest ambition of the very rich, and the festal entrance of the tem-

[1] Rom. xii. 1; Tit. iii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13.

porary holder of the dignity, into the city, in purple robes, with a crown of laurel on his brows, behind the white-robed temple boys swinging their smoking censers, was, to the little world of the Province, what the victory at the games and the Olympic crown had been to the Greeks. In whatever town he lived, the Christian saw either a temple to the emperor, as Jupiter, or statues of him in the streets, with altars before them, on which loyalty demanded that every passer-by should throw some grains of incense, in homage to the man-god. What could this be but the visible coming forth of Antichrist; the glorification, as divine, of the persecutor who was drunk with the blood of the saints? But an idol was, to all Jews and Christians, a devil, and this being so, the idol of the emperor was necessarily a diabolical symbol. He must, therefore, be the Antichrist foretold by Jesus, and the empire that of the Evil One, which was to perish when the Lord appeared. Did not his worship as the god of gods, by all "Asia," fulfil the very words of Paul to the Thessalonians,[1] written fourteen years before the Apocalypse was sent abroad, when he said that the day of Christ's descent to earth in judgment would come when there had been "first, a falling away" among the churches from the faith, and from their first love,—as, alas, it was too certain there had been; adding that when this was seen, "the man of lawless sin would be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God?" Had not Caligula thrust his statue into the synagogues, to be worshipped as very God? Had he not ordered it to be set up even in the

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4.

Temple at Jerusalem, and, now, had not Nero "opposed" and "set himself above God and His Christ, and slain the saints, whose blood cried from under the altar for vengeance, day and night," and yet was he not worshipped in every city, as above all gods? The high-priest of each city was elected yearly, by the deputies from the different towns of each district, in their council or parliament, and was the great man of the community, being also, in "Asia," as I have said, the president of the yearly festival of emperor-worship, and of its games and spectacles. As high-priest, he was naturally jealous of any slight to the altars over which he presided, and kept a watchful eye on the Christians lest any of them neglected to offer incense before the emperor's statue, as that of the great local god; throwing into prison, and bitterly punishing the refractory.[1] They were thus exposed, constantly, to that tribulation in which John had been their fellow-sufferer,[2] and had now against them, not the mere hatred of the Jews, stirring up tumults, and spreading calumnies and false charges of turbulence, but the far more alarming hostility of the imperial authorities. The powers of the Pit were raging against their Lord, and Nero was their instrument. Clearly he was the Antichrist who was to be swept away, with all his agents and abettors, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with the angels of His power, in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.[3] To the Christians, Rome was on the brink of final destruction: the empire would presently be a hideous dream of the past. Nero, certainly, was said to

[1] Mommsen's *Geschichte*, v. 321 ff.
[2] Rev. i. 9.
[3] 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

be dead, but it was doubtful if he really were so. Rumours of his reappearance were rife, and it seemed reasonable that such a monster should be reserved for a fate more striking than to die obscurely. Surely he and all their enemies—enemies also of their Lord, would be openly destroyed by the breath of the Messiah, at His coming! A false Nero had already appeared in Greece and the provinces of Asia Minor, exciting new terrors in the Christians, and strange hopes in the friends of the missing Cæsar.[1] Some said he was a slave from Pontus; others, that he was an Italian slave. He was at least a good imitation, for he had Nero's great eyes, his thick head of hair, his wild look, his fierce and theatrical head, and like him, he played the harp and sang. Setting out with a troop, to reach Egypt and Syria, that he might gain a footing, where Nero was expected, if really alive, this adventurer was thrown by a storm on the island of Cythnos, about thirty miles south-east of Sunium, which, itself, is about thirty miles south-east of Athens. There he increased his followers, by enrolling some soldiers, on their way back from the East, and launched out into bloody executions of opponents, and into pillage of the well-to-do, and arming of the slaves. The excitement grew intense. From the closing weeks of 68 till the impostor was killed in the opening of 69, he filled the thoughts of all Greece and Asia Minor. Elsewhere, fierce partisans kept up the report that Nero was still alive; set up his statues again, and forced men to honour them; and, it is said, even in some cases coined money bearing his name. Meanwhile, the Christians, especially in Asia Minor, were agonised by the fear that they would be required,

[1] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 8, 9.

once more to worship him, and at the very least, be socially ruined; shunned by all, and unable either to buy or sell;[1] while apostasy would bring down on them the awful doom "to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, unmixed in the cup of His anger."[2]

The affairs of the empire added fuel to this frenzied excitement. Vindex, the head of the revolt of Gaul, was dead, but so was Nero, and with him, as I have said, the line of the Cæsars ended. Hitherto, no one had dreamed of contending with the sacred Julian blood, for the honours of empire, but the throne was now open to the strongest competitor. Verginius Rufus, consul in Germany, proclaimed emperor by his soldiers, had given way to Galba, consul in Spain, who had been accepted in Nero's place, by the Senate, and had adopted Piso as his colleague. The favourites of Nero had been killed, and obscure pretenders to the empire had shared the same fate, but Galba also had been murdered, along with Piso, after a reign of little more than six months. Otho had succeeded, but found a rival in Vitellius, and had killed himself after being defeated by him in Northern Italy The confusion was terrible. On the 3rd January 69 the legions of Germany had proclaimed Vitellius; on the 10th, Galba adopted Piso; and on the 15th, Otho was proclaimed at Rome, so that, for some hours, there were three emperors. Galba being killed, it was not likely that Otho would keep his giddy eminence, and the friends of Nero did not hide their expectation that their strange favourite, so much missed by the populace, would soon be once more among them. Amidst this universal commotion, the Apocalypse appeared in Asia Minor.

[1] Rev. xiii. 17. [2] Rev. xiv. 9.

Books in the symbolical style of Revelation had long been familiar to the Jews and Christians. Ezekiel's visions were the first example, so far as we know, of this new way of clothing prophecy. He had introduced colossal imagery taken, beyond question, from the special sights around him in Assyria and Babylonia, as in his vision of the four cherubim and the four wheels.[1] Zechariah had followed in a similar style, in his visions of the mystic horses, the horns, the flying roll, the two women with the wings of storks, and, to name no other, that of the four symbolical chariots. But the Book of Daniel showed the new fashion of composition in its full development, and from that time, this symbolical writing had become the usual style of Jewish non-canonical books, dealing with the future, near or distant. The Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Fourth Book of Esdras, the Book of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Book of Jubilees, the Martyrdom of Isaiah, the Psalter of Solomon, and the Jewish Sybillines, illustrate the school of cryptic writing, before and after the days of Nero. The Syrian persecutions had kindled the visions of one apocalyptic writer, the Roman occupation had produced another, the hateful reign of Herod a third, and it was apparently inevitable that the extraordinary crisis following the death of Nero, should be similarly made the theme of vision and symbolic imagery.

In harmony with this natural course of things, men, in these awful days, found that the Seer of Patmos had embodied the hopes and fears of the churches in such a writing; its great theme being the troubles to be poured

[1] Ezek. i.

out on the earth before the manifestation of the Lord; the comfort by which believers should be sustained amidst all; the awful destruction of Antichrist and his followers at the coming of Christ, which it is assumed throughout is close at hand; and the glorious reign of the faithful, with the Lord, in a world purified by fire, from the defilement of the wicked. In the revelation of their Lord, they are taught, lay the hope of His people, and hence the book ends as it opens, with earnest prayer that it may not be delayed: its whole burden throughout, being the divine story of the "Revealing" of Jesus, the Christ, after the destruction of His enemies, and the millennial glories of His Kingdom upon earth; soon, very soon, to be set up By its inspired author it is called "the Apocalypse or Manifestation of our Lord;" a name of which "Revelation" is thus only the English equivalent. But as our English word is not exclusively a proper name, I have, for the sake of clearness, retained the Greek title of the original.

CHAPTER VII

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE— (THAT IS, THE THEOLOGIAN)

In the following study and illustration of the Revelation of St. John, I do not pretend to offer anything like a prophetical treatment of its contents, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, but would have it distinctly understood that I confine myself wholly to an exposition of their relation to the churches to which the book was written, and to the times then passing. I leave the ground free for another course, by those who prefer to give what they may deem the application of the sacred text to a wider historical range; embracing, it may be, the sweep of all past and future history of the Church and the world.

"Revelation" is expressly called by its author a "prophecy"[1] which, he tells us, refers to the almost immediate future, for it treats, to use his own words, of "things which must shortly come to pass," and says that "the time is at hand."[2] In this respect it closely resembles the discourses of our Lord on the last things, in St. Matthew, the personal return of Christ being represented, in both, as the one but all-sufficient hope of His followers. It also echoes, in this, the words of the angels, at the Ascension, when they comforted the disciples by the promise of the Saviour coming back in glory; and it is no less at one with the

[1] Rev. i. 3. [2] Rev. i. 1, 3.

deepest and most marked characteristic of all New Testament hope and prophecy, in pointing, like them, to the personal Coming of Christ as that supreme event which illuminates the whole history of Redemption, from His resurrection to the final judgment.[1] Christ's return, indeed, is the burden of the whole Book, whether regarded as "prophecy" or "revelation;" marking, alike, its opening and its close,[2] and the cry for that Coming rises from the lips of the Church through the whole of it, to its end.[3] It is indeed, the story of the then immediately expected "Revelation" or "Revealing," "of Jesus Christ," given by God to John—as, of old, revelations, or disclosures of the divine purposes, were given to the prophets;—to "show to His servants," the followers of Christ, "the things which must shortly come to pass"—the judgments that must precede the near coming of the Lord and the subsequent glory of His reign amidst His saints. The revealing of these judgments, then believed to be impending, and of the felicity that was to follow, for all who proved faithful to the end, occupies the body of the book; short epistles to the Asiatic churches, which form an introduction to it, presenting only solemn warnings and counsels, to prepare them for the awful crisis impending, and the glory to come after, in the presence of their Lord.

That these epistles are addressed to the churches of the province of Asia, naturally raises the question as to when and where "Revelation" was written, and by whom. Its author speaks of himself[4] as living in the same region as that of the churches he addresses, and as it has been, since the earliest ages, associated with the Apostle John,

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 5; 1 Cor. i. 7; xv. 22; 1 Thess. iv. 14; 1 John ii. 28.
[2] Rev. i. 7; xxii. 7, 12, 20. [3] Rev. xxii. 1, 7, 20. [4] Rev. i. 9.

whose later years are believed to have been spent at Ephesus, it inevitably suggests itself, that, unless there are strong grounds for hesitation, we may conclude the "beloved disciple" rather than any other of the same name, to have written it.

Various expressions in the Apocalypse itself appear to show conclusively that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem. Thus we read that the heathen "shall tread the Holy City under foot forty and two months;"[1] words which, in connection with others to be noticed hereafter, seem to indicate that it was composed between the end of December A.D. 69 and the spring of A.D. 70; that is, in the opening months of the reign of Vespasian. I omit conjectural or hypothetical arguments, for which I have no taste, since they are open to endless dispute; contenting myself with feeling that various passages, as we shall see, appear best explained by assigning this date to the book.

The island of Patmos, with its steep bare cliffs, its wide central valley, rising to the site of the little town which now looks down from the interior on the sea, is expressly stated to have been the scene of the vision recorded in the first chapter, and it may well be that those composing the rest of the book, were also vouchsafed in that sequestered retreat. Yet it does not seem to be implied that they were all written down on the moment, for the residence on the island is mentioned, in the opening of the book,[2] as in a past time; not that in which the "prophecy" was committed to writing. John may have gone on missionary work to the island, and in its silence and isolation from the world, opened his soul to the divine revelations, for

[1] Rev. xi. 2. [2] Rev. i. 9.

which he was thus prepared; but his home, as he tells us, was in the region of the seven churches, and he may have written out the mysterious communications he had been honoured to receive, after his return to the mainland; his home being probably at Ephesus, which is nearest Patmos, and perhaps is named first in the "epistles," on account of its being the writer's own city.

Patmos, from the North East. (*From a sketch by H. G. Powell, Esq.*)

The author tells us his name was John, but it has been gravely questioned whether he is to be regarded as the apostle of that name, or some unknown personage, also called John; the fact that he does not say he is the apostle, leaving the matter unsettled. The mention of Patmos, indeed, has been thought to connect the name with the beloved disciple, since there is a tradition that he was banished to that island. But the historical value of this

is seriously invalidated by the fact, that it confessedly sprang from the words of the author himself, which, however, make no suggestion of banishment.[1] To quote the passages in the Fathers in which the authorship is ascribed to the apostle, on the ground of a mere legend of his having been thus banished to Patmos, would only confuse, and I therefore refer those who may wish to read them, to formal commentaries, in which these conflicting and unsubstantial details are given. It is, moreover, hardly conceivable that the apostle, had he been the author, and that, as is thought, at the close of his life, would have addressed the seven churches, with which he had been so long in exalted relations as their apostle, merely as a "brother, and a partaker with them of the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience which is in Jesus."[2]

No trace of apostolic authority or rank is to be found in the book, or any claim of that paternal relation to his "little children" on which the apostle dwells in his First Epistle; a tenderness that must have marked the Apocalypse, written in the afternoon of his life, if written by the apostle at all. Nor is there, anywhere, any allusion whatever to the endearing love between the writer and our Lord, which was so marked a feature in the apostle's mind. It can hardly, moreover, be thought that one so retiring and self-concealing would have spoken of the names of the twelve apostles, his own among others, being graven on the twelve foundations of the wall of the heavenly city.[3]

But the conclusive proof, to my mind, that John the theologian was not John the apostle, is the striking contrast between the style of the Apocalypse and the writings

[1] Rev. i. 9. [2] Rev. i. 9. [3] Rev. xxi. 14.

of the beloved disciple. It looks at things and describes them, in a way unknown in the apostle's compositions, while some minor details of its teaching, and many peculiarities in its language, are no less different from anything in his Gospel or Epistles. How strong is the contrast between the simple style and calm sublimity of thought in the apostle's writings, with its gracious living power and its sweep of spiritual vision, and the Daniel-like imagery which marks the Apocalypse throughout! How different the references of our Lord and of the apostle, to the Second Coming, from the long series of plagues let loose in the earth in the Apocalypse, and of horrors brought on mankind by scorpion-like locusts, resembling war-horses, which rise out of the abode of Satan in the "abyss"[1] or from its armies of horses breathing out fire, and smoke, and brimstone,[2] or the other terrific judgments which it discloses in this highly-wrought symbolism, as the precursors of the Return of Christ! How different from the Gospel or Epistles of the apostle, who touches all spiritual things so spiritually, is its colossal and overpowering imagery of such things, addressed to the senses, through fixed numbers and visible forms; as when it speaks of the seven spirits of God, the appearance of the throne of God and of the New Jerusalem, of the seven angels, of the angel of the waters, and of mystical numbers and localities, veiled under figurative language![3] Inspiration never effaces the mental individuality of a sacred writer, but leaves his special endowments and expression to Isaiah or Jeremiah, or Peter or Paul: not using the inspired soul as a merely passive instru-

[1] Rev. ix. 1–11. [2] Rev. ix. 13–21.
[3] Rev. i. 4, 5, 6; viii. 2; xvi. 5; ix. 14; xvi. 19.

ment, but, rather, glorifying and prompting the human faculties, so that they utter, still in their own way, the message of God communicated to them. This being so, it appears to me self-evident that a mind so coloured in its every faculty by Oriental modes of thought and perception, and so given to embody even the sublimities of the upper heavens in mystical imagery addressed to the senses, is utterly different from that of the apostle, which instinctively turns to lofty thought and contemplation, dwelling habitually amidst the purely spiritual; never dreaming of presenting the mysteries so dear to him in human imagery even the most refined, and, indeed, introducing common narrative at all, only when needed, as leading to the higher aspects of the divine.

Nor is it to be overlooked that the Apocalypse speaks of matters on which the apostle is wholly silent. Thus, it tells us of a first and second resurrection, of which the apostle says nothing, and of a binding of Satan for a thousand years, during which the nations are not to be deceived by him — this millennial felicity intervening between the two resurrections;[1] the apostle being silent on this point also. He speaks, figuratively, indeed, of belief in Christ as a virtual resurrection in this life, but places the actual resurrection from the dead at the Coming of Christ.[2] The difference in the representation of the Antichrist, and his hostility to Christ and the Church, is no less marked. With the apostle, there have already been many Antichrists, but they are described as false brethren who have left the faith,[3] whereas the

[1] Rev. xx. 1–6

[2] John v. 25 ff., compare 1 John iii. 14.

[3] 1 John ii. 18, 19.

Apocalypse paints Antichrist as a beast rising out of the sea, or as a two-horned beast, or as the false prophet[1]—the Roman Empire, as represented by the emperor, being symbolised by one of these beasts, while the false prophet is a personification of all the seducing influences by which the heathen world had come to worship it.

The belief that the apostle wrote the Apocalypse is, however, very old, for Justin Martyr speaks of him as its author, within fifty years of the death of this last of the Twelve. But it is easy to imagine how, in Ephesus, where he had lived so long and was so profoundly venerated, the name John, when found, in a book already spread through the churches, as that of its author, would at once be assumed to refer to the apostle; and this idea once started, future testimonies would practically be only its echoes. We all know, indeed, how easy it is, even now, to ascribe writings to the more prominent of two authors of the same name, if both write on similar topics.

As the tradition of the apostolic authorship of the book seems to have risen only from the writer being of the same name as the beloved disciple, so, all the statements of ecclesiastical tradition as to the time and place of the composition of the Apocalypse, are indissolubly connected with the traditional belief in the supposed banishment of the Apostle John to Patmos; apparently an unhistorical legend, springing only from a misunderstanding of the text in which that island is mentioned. The whole tradition of such a banishment of the apostle is, in fact, in the highest degree doubtful. Hegesippus, the earliest chronicler, who lived in the first century after Christ, and fragments of whose writings are preserved by Eusebius,

[1] Rev. xiii. 1 ff.; xvii. 3 ff.; xx. 10; xiii. 11 ff.; xvii. 11.

knows nothing of it, or of the apostle's martyrdom, while notices of it at a later date assign that of the Apocalypse to the end of the reign of Domitian—A.D. 81–96—in contradiction to its own internal evidence, which shows that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem. One tradition makes the apostle return from Patmos to Ephesus; another, tells us he was put to death in Rome, before the date given for his banishment by other legends. The story expands as it grows older, till we hear of his having been thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, and coming out of it more vigorous for the dreadful immersion. We are told, further, in one version of the story, that he was banished by Claudius, A.D. 41–54, while Origen, A.D. 185–253, appeals to the verse in which Patmos is mentioned, telling us that "John himself reports the circumstance, not saying that any one accused him, but simply relating in the Apocalypse that he was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus—and it thus appears that the Apocalypse was written in that island." Since, therefore, the ecclesiastical traditions have all rested on the supposition that it was revealed to the Apostle John while he was "in exile" at Patmos, and that this happened at the end of the reign of Domitian, and since all this superstructure of invention admittedly rests only on a verse in which no mention of banishment can be found—one writer simply echoing an earlier; and since, notwithstanding these traditions, the book was certainly written before the fall of the Holy City, it follows that the mention of Patmos by the author is no ground for concluding that John the Theologian, or "Divine," was identical with St. John the apostle. But whatever conclusion we adopt, it is none

the less certain that "Revelation" is to be honoured as duly canonical and sacred; its reception, as such, by the churches, dating from the earliest times.

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

I. 1. This is the divine story of the impending Revelation or Revealing, of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, Jesus Christ, to show unto His servants; even the things which must shortly come to pass: and He, Jesus Christ, sent and made it known, by His angel, to His servant John; 2. who bare witness, in this book, of the word of God thus revealed to him, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ which it contains—for *He* sent it; even of all the things that he, John, saw. 3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written in it: for the time of Christ's coming, which will crown the faithful with bliss, is at hand.

Dedication of the book to the seven churches in Asia.

4. JOHN to the seven churches in the province of Asia:[1] Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His, God's, throne; 5. and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

As has been noticed, there were other churches in "Asia" when the Apocalypse was written, besides those mentioned in the "Epistles," which, therefore, appear to have been selected as representatives of the Christian community as a whole: the "roll" or "book," being, doubtless, circulated everywhere, and read in all the local assemblings of the brethren.

The expression, so strange to Western minds,—"The

[1] NOTE.—Proconsular Asia embraced Phrygia, Mysia, Caria, Lydia, Ionia, and Æolia.

seven Spirits which are before the throne," seems only to be an instance of the employment of a familiar Hebrew idiom by which, in harmony with its import in many parts of Scripture, the number seven stands for the conception of completeness. In this case, indeed, it might, in the sacred writer's mind, be only a figurative way for representing the varied perfections which, blended, make up our conception of the One Divine

Region of the Seven Churches.

Spirit, as one might speak of the seven rays which we can untwine from one—the seven tints which unite to form the sacred whiteness of unbroken light.

From extreme antiquity, that number had, indeed, been, in a sense, almost sacred, in Western Asia, from which the Hebrews came. Thus, the nations on the Euphrates had a week of seven days, each of which was consecrated to one of

the seven divinities identified with the seven planets. They believed that seven evil spirits were created in Chaos: the great dragon Tiamath, in their mythology, had seven heads, and the mystical powers of this number were held to cure the sick, by proper magical knots twisted seven times seven. Carrying this way of speaking and writing with them from Mesopotamia to Palestine, the Jews had seven days in their cosmogony; the seventh day was the holy Sabbath; the seventh year was consecrated as the Sabbath of the land, and the forty-ninth —seven times seven—as the Jubilee. There were seven sacred trumpets, and the sacred candlestick had seven branches, while many sacrifices, like those of Balaam, required seven victims. The later Jews extended this mystical use of seven in every direction, in their religious speculations, and it is curious that in the Apocalypse, which is so strongly coloured by the prevalent modes of expression of the age, seven constantly occurs in its metaphors. Thus, there are seven churches, seven candlesticks seven Spirits, seven stars, seven lamps, and the Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes; there are seven angels before God, for special services; there were seven thunders; the great dragon, like that of the Babylonians, has seven heads; there are seven last plagues, seven golden vials; and seven kings appear in the vision of the beast, which, itself, has seven heads. The "seven Spirits of God" may, therefore, be regarded as only a popular Hebrew way of expressing the various modes in which the One Holy Spirit exerts His perfections, in the moral government of God, and this explanation appears to find support from the language of the prophet Zechariah, who tells us in the same apocalyptic style, that the mystical

stone laid before Joshua, the high-priest, had on it seven eyes, which are "the eyes of the Lord, that run to and fro through the whole earth:"[1] a passage offering a striking parallel to that in which our book speaks of the "seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth."[2] These may, therefore, be reasonably taken as a figurative expression, when named in the opening of the Apocalypse, or elsewhere, for the divine perfections of the One Holy Spirit of the Gospels and the Epistles, as, in the vision of Zechariah, the "seven eyes" are a figurative expression for "the eyes of the Lord;" indicating His universal oversight of human affairs.

The use of the number seven with this fulness of allegorical meaning, was the more natural, from the adoption by John of the current style of the Jewish religious literature of his day. The rabbis, as we know, spoke of seven angels before the throne; the conception having its origin, in all probability, from Jewish theology having clothed its visions of the majesty of the upper heavens, in stately imagery drawn from that seen in the palaces of the Persian sultans, for centuries their sovereigns; seven princes standing before the throne of the Great King, in Susa, or Ecbatana, or Persepolis. Thus, in the Book of Tobit, written some time between the fourth and the second century before Christ, we read of Raphael as "one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints, and go in and out before the glory of the Holy One."[3] These seven angels, says Rabbi Eliezer, were created first, and minister to God outside the veil.

[1] Zech. iii. 9; iv. 10. [2] Rev. v. 6.

[3] Fritsche omits "seven" in his *Handbuch*, 1853, but retains it in his *Libri Apocryphi*, 1871. The Variorum Bible omits it, but in any case, it

But it may be that the true explanation lies nearer our hand, for the word "spirit" is, of course, often used of angels in Scripture, and it is urged that it should be so understood here, since in Hebrews,[1] it is said, "Are they not all, ministering Spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?" Why should these seven Spirits, it is asked, not be the seven of Jewish theology, since John had adopted so much else from it? Why not understand them simply as the ministering angels through whom God executes His sovereign will in the service of the Church; in fact, to come back to the idea already advanced, as a poetical figure for the varied energies of the one Spirit of the Gospels and New Testament generally?

The name "the faithful witness" given to Christ is used more than once in the Apocalypse.[2] It was, in fact, the name He had given to Himself when before Pilate,[3] in the sublime words—"To this end have I been born, and to this end have I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."

The prominence given to His being "the first-born of the dead" is in keeping with the whole of the New Testa-

was the belief of the Jews of John's day, for the Targum of Jonathan on Gen. xi. 7, tells us that "there are seven angels who stand before God," and Jonathan is said to have been a pupil of Hillel, who lived in the generation before Christ. The tradition, as given in the Talmud (*Baba bathra*, c. viii. f. 134 a), is worth quoting, to show what the rabbis thought of their order, and what superstition reigned among them. "Our rabbis say that there were eighty disciples of Hillel, thirty of whom were honoured by the Shechina—the visible presence of God,—resting over them,—as over our lawgiver Moses; another thirty, at whose word the sun would stand still, as it did at the word of Joshua, the son of Nun, and twenty, who ranked between these; but the greatest of all was Jonathan ben Uzziél."

[1] Heb. i. 14. [2] Rev. iii. 14; xix. 11; xxii. 6.

[3] John xviii. 37; 1 Tim. vi. 13.

ment, which echoes, throughout, the words of Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain."[1] But, now risen, and clothed with the powers of the world to come; all these powers having been committed to Him, in heaven and on earth,"[2] John, in common with all the Christians of his day, might well call Jesus, the Ruler of the kings of the earth; even Nero, in all his might, being only permitted by Him to monarchise for a brief moment, before being destroyed by the consuming lightnings of His wrath.

6. Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom, and to be priests to His God and Father: to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7. Behold, He cometh with the clouds that mark the divine presence; and every eye shall see Him, and they who pierced Him—so soon will He come! and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him: Even so. Amen.

God, who "gives the revelation of Jesus Christ, to be shown by Him to His servants," now proclaims Himself; setting His seal on it, as from Him, before it is recorded, and thus stamping the whole book as a divine disclosure of the mysterious relations of our Lord to His people, and also to those who refused His salvation—that is, to the Christian and the heathen world.

John had given the double assurance of the truth of what he was about to record, by a double, solemn asseveration, in Greek and Hebrew, indicated by the two forms translated "even so" and "Amen," and now, the Almighty adds His testimony to its divine truthfulness.

8. I am the Alpha and the Omega, that is, "the beginning

[1] Cor. xv. 14. [2] Matt. xxviii. 18.

and the ending of all things," saith the Lord God, **who is,** and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

John next receives from Christ, in a vision, the command to write down the revelations about to be vouchsafed him, and to send them to the seven churches of Proconsular Asia, named. Like the old prophets he prefaces this high commission by reciting as his authority to speak and write, the divine summons he has received to do so.[1]

9. **I John, your brother and partaker with you in** the tribulation, and kingdom, and patient endurance **which are our lot and glory** in **and through** Jesus, was in the island that is called Patmos, for—**that is, to receive**—the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, **there to be revealed to me.**

He had gone to Patmos to receive the revelation of "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus;" the seclusion of such a spot fitting such a mysterious intercourse of humanity with the spiritual world. Patmos, as I have said, lies near Ephesus, being, in fact only about sixty miles south-west of that city, and about forty from Miletus, where Paul touched and sent for the elders of the Ephesian church. It is only about eight miles long, north and south, and about four miles across, at its upper end. A little below this the land recedes, and a deep bay, about two miles across, facing the south-east, almost divides the island into two. A smaller bay fills another bend in the coast immediately south of this larger one. The ground, in some parts, slopes up from the sea, westwards; in others, there are walls of rock sinking sheer down into the blue water. In the middle,

[1] Jer. i.; Isa. vi.; Ezek. i.–iii.; Amos vii. 14 ff.

the outline rises to a height which would be the site of a far-shining lighthouse in any other government than that of the Turk, and, throughout, the whole island is, on the west, a waving background of rounded heights, from which one looks on the sea beneath, and, beyond the long pleasant valleys, to islands between Patmos and the mainland. The population are nearly all sailors, and hence there are comparatively few men at any time to be seen. A town on the highest part of the island, is very prettily situated with churches and convents rising above the houses, and a few alleged memorials of the old city of apostolic times are still shown, including a cave in which, it is believed, John wrote the Apocalypse, though it is hard to understand why he should have chosen a damp cave, when there were plenty of human habitations of all sorts.

He now introduces the circumstances of his receiving the divine communications.

10. I was in the Spirit, like Peter at Joppa, or Paul in the Temple,[1] on the Lord's day,—the first day of the week, the day of our Lord's resurrection, sacred to us Christians above all the rest,[2] and I heard behind me a great voice loud as that of a trumpet, 11. saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches; to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. 12. And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13. and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a Son of man,[3] clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about, at the breasts, with a golden girdle. 14. And His head and His hair were white as white wool; white as snow;

[1] Acts xi. 5; xxii. 17. [2] 1 Cor. xvi. 2; Acts xx. 7.
[3] There is no article, so that it is not here, *The* Son of man.

and His eyes were as a flame of fire; 15. and His feet like burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and His voice as the voice of many waters. 16. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. 17. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead. And He laid His right hand on me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, 18. and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things that are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter; 20. the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

Christ is thus seen standing in the midst of symbols of the churches, holding in His right hand those of their "bishops" or "overseers"; thus justifying and sustaining the sure hope of His people in Him, which it is the object of the book to fortify. As He has already been described as making them kings and priests,[1] He is robed in high-priestly and kingly splendour: His rich outer vestment reaching to His feet, reminding John, we may fancy, of that of the earthly high-priest, which was regarded by his people, we know not on what grounds, as symbolising the whole world,[2] and recalling to us the robes of the Eternal, in the vision of Isaiah, with skirts filling the Temple.[3] The girdle entirely of gold was restricted to kings,[4] for that of the high-priest was only ornamented with that metal,[5] but, like that of Christ, here, it was worn "about

[1] Verse 6. [2] Wisd. xviii. 24. So Philo and Josephus also.
[3] Isa. vi. 1. [4] 1 Macc. x. 89. [5] Exod. xxviii. 8; xxxix. 5

the breast," not lower down, as with kings.[1] His head and hair, white as snow, reproduce the language of Daniel describing the majesty of "the Ancient of Days:" His eternal existence being apparently indicated by the whiteness;[2] in keeping with His claim of uncreated being, as "the first and the last." His eyes, like a flame of fire, harmonise with the imagery used in Daniel; such glowing eyes being a characteristic ascribed also to the heathen gods, as we see, in Virgil and Homer;[3] to remind us of the penetrating glance with which Omniscience looks through all men, and judges all things. The feet, shining like refined brass, may be only a trait of majesty, but they may speak, also, of His treading His enemies under them, as the eyes may express His wrath against them. His voice, compared before to a trumpet, is further described as like the sound of many waters: filling one with a sense of irresistible power. In His right hand He holds the seven stars, which represent the "angels" of the seven churches, thus under His care and wholly His own. His divine might is additionally proclaimed by the appearance as of a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth; another way of announcing that He will "slay the lawless one with the breath of His mouth,"[4] and that "the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword."[5] Unspeakable splendour shines from His countenance and floats round the whole vision, as of the sun when its light is most overpowering. It is striking and suggestive to notice the resemblance of this imagery to that in the Book of Daniel, when the prophet, standing "by the side of the

[1] Jos. *Ant.* iii. 7, 2. [2] Dan. vii. 9.
[3] Virg. *Æneid*, v 647 ff.; Hom. *Il.* xix. 365 ff.
[4] 2 Thess. ii. 8. [5] Heb. iv. 12.

great river Hiddekel, or Tigris, lifted up his eyes, and, behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with pure gold of Uphas: His body also was like the beryl (or aqua-marine—a stone greatly prized for its lovely greenish-blue tinge),—and His face as the appearance of lightning, and His eyes as flames of fire, and His arms and His feet like in colour to burnished brass, and the voice of His words like the voice of a multitude."[1]

At the sight of a vision so transcendent John tells us he fell at its feet as one dead, but presently felt the right hand of the Wondrous Form laid on him, and heard words that rebuked his fears, and composed his spirit for the task assigned him. As a mortal and a sinner, he was afraid of the powers of the Unseen World, dreading death in thus coming face to face with them. But the glorified Jesus tells him to dismiss his alarm. As the First and the Last, that is, no other than the Almighty,[2] and as the Living One, who had stooped to death, but was now alive for evermore, He had the keys of death and Hades, and, as, thus, their Lord, could deliver man from their power, for He had triumphed over them openly. John might, therefore, with calm mind, write down what he was now to hear. His risen, divine Lord, whom he saw, had come to him as the Living One, bringing love, not wrath.

The Epistle to the Church at Ephesus.

Jesus has been fully described in the Life of St. Paul, in these "Hours,"[3] but having just returned from a second journey in the footsteps of the apostle, I am able to supplement the account of the once magnificent city, by additional details. It lay about thirty-three

[1] Dan. x. 6. [2] Rev. i. 8. [3] Geikie's "St. Paul," vol. i. 68–74.

miles nearly south of Smyrna, from which its ruins may be most easily reached: a railway now extending to them from the latter city, though what the very few trains get to carry, either to them or from them, apart from a chance freight of tourists, is hard to imagine. The landscape round Smyrna is charming. Broad, luxuriantly fertile valleys alternate with wide plains, shut in, along the

Anc ent Ephesus.

far-off horizon, by hills and mountaims, which often run into the valleys or plains themselves, breaking them up into lovely green bays and long-drawn recesses. The dry, or nearly dry, beds of streams, swollen and stormy enough, no doubt, during the winter storms, are crossed and recrossed, and the country gradually rises into a tableland characteristic of the interior of Asia Minor as

a whole. Near Smyrna, pleasant houses dot the borders of the line, but the population beyond the suburbs very soon becomes painfully small. Scarcely any one passed, though, here and there, a few people were at work in the fields, especially round the poor villages that now and then varied the general solitude. There is no forest, and

Site of Ephesus. (*From a Photograph by Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett.*)

few timber trees, but the surpassing wealth of the soil was everywhere evident in rich shrubbery, wide grassy expanses, and, where there was cultivation, in wide vine and olive yards, and a wealth of mighty fig-trees, white-blossomed almonds, and pomegranates, or other fruit-trees. The crops of grain were as yet green; the beans and green

legumes, pleasant to see. At times, near Smyrna, large herds of cattle, goodly to look upon as any in England, and great flocks of sheep and goats, told what might have been seen everywhere had there been people to tend or own them. But for miles before the point at which the train stopped, the landscape became more and more desolate. Everywhere, wild nature had resumed possession of what, in Roman times, had been the richest province of the empire. Long tracts had been left to become swamps, morasses, or shallow lakes, dotted over with clumps of bulrushes, and haunted by flights of waterfowl. Mile after mile, for want of a population to use the proffered luxuriance of the region, the wide landscape was given over to the thorn, the briar, and the reed. Districts that might be fertile as Eden, and had, in fact, once been so, were an uninhabited wilderness. Five or six miles before reaching Ephesus, we had to leave the road and jog across open, unoccupied expanses; the first signs of nearing the once great city being the sight of countless fragments of marble and other precious building material—the wreck of public buildings or stately mansions,—which pitifully littered the ground. Capitals of great pillars, pieces of carved blocks, remains of statues, sections of proud marble columns, quantities of Roman bricks, and all the shattered and outcast memorials of a splendid metropolis, looked up from some ditch into which they had been dragged, out of the peasant cultivator's way, or lay on the mostly unbroken surface of the wide rough common, or by the side of the riding track. In some places, indeed, they made it difficult to keep one's seat, as the horse cautiously got down from a higher to a lower footing, over a heap of ruin. The

face of the landscape was actually white with bits of what had once been a temple, a mansion, a courthouse, a gymnasium, or some other detail of civic splendour.

Ephesus-proper lay, as we know, partly, in the plain along the banks of the Cayster, but it extended up the hills I had to cross before descending to the lower level.

At the Site of Temple of Diana, Ephesus. (*From a Photograph by H. G. Powell, Esq.*)

The plain is now above five miles across, but in New Testament days it must have been smaller; the whole western side of Ionia having slowly risen since then, so that the alluvium deposited by the river has turned into dry land, from this cause and from neglect, much that, in old days, was dock, or lake, or river channel. The line

of embankment alongside which ships moored, is, hence, now, far inland, and there is no sign of Ephesus ever having been a seaport. Coming from Smyrna, the first break in the plain one meets is an oblong hollow full of large stones, like the rough output of a quarry; but these blocks and heaps, and this uninviting pit, mark the site of the great Temple of Diana; once the centre of so much, with its colonnades, and far-stretching grounds, and sacred lakes and fountains, and rustling groves, and festal crowds from all the world. South-west of this lay the inner harbour, now long ago silted up and raised above the sea-level, by the general elevation of the coast. Two small tributaries once flowed into the sparkling Cayster; one on the east, the other on the west side of the city, but they are now gone. Due south from the proud temple, at the foot of a hill about a third of a mile off, lay the huge stadium, 700 feet long and 90 broad, which could, when desired, be made into an amphitheatre. A huge building, once warehouses and barracks for sailors, stood on the edge of the quay, 300 yards off, to the south-west, and, between the two, at the corner of a triangle, still to the south, seating 24,500, rose the vast theatre, 456 feet in diameter, surrounded by a spacious and imposing colonnade; the scene of the great tumult on account of St. Paul. Close behind was the Agora, or market-place, surrounded by pillars, and across the road from that, a temple with Corinthian columns. The Odeium, a grand open-air opera-house; a temple of Olympian Jupiter; and the Gymnasium, for the training of athletes and the exhibition of their feats, were all near this, close under the slopes of the short hill-range of Coressus, which ran for about two miles, from south-east to north-west; the city wall stretching along

Gateway at Ephesus. (*From a Photograph by H G. Powell, Esq.*)

Mound at Ephesus (*From a Photograph by Rev. Dr. F. Tremellt.*)

its rounded summits, while the now silent green ascents and hollows, very picturesque in outline, were then covered with buildings, mainly of the working classes.

The modern village of Ayasluk stands at the foot and on the north-west slope of the hill Pion and the range Coressus, which are close together, and boasts of the ruins

Monastery of St. John, Ephesus. (*From a Photograph by Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett.*)

of a church reputed to have been the restoration of one more ancient, built by Justinian over the tomb of St. John; but for this tradition there is no historical support. A huge ruined monastery, once that of St. John, built from the spoil of the temple of Diana, rises like a great barrack at the foot of the hills; the village standing at some

distance from it. There are only a few houses, all of humble or moderate pretensions, the hotel of the place showing no outward signs of being so, as the village needs very small provision for travellers; its special supplies, having to be brought on camels or horses from Smyrna. No one seemed to be doing anything; the few shopkeepers

Roman Arch and Ruins at Ephesus. (*From a Photograph by Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett.*)

standing at the doors in amiable gossip with their sadly dirty and squalid fellow-villagers, and two or three camels standing or lying, as idly, in the street.

Of all the glories of Ephesus nothing is left but heaps of stones, or gaunt remains of once great structures respecting which one may speculate at his will. A Roman

arch and a Roman gateway still stand, some miles from the present village, and an immense building near them in sad ruin, stretching along a paved way high over the plain,—the line of the ancient quays,—is perhaps the ancient imperial magazine or the custom-house. The market-place is a confusion of ruins, and so are all the other details of the once mighty centre of a trade drawn from the pillars of Hercules on the west, to Syria on the east, and from the Sea of Azof on the north, to Abyssinia on the south; the whole scene making it hard to realise that such an utter solitude could ever have been the crowded seat of a vast industrious population.

St. Paul had founded and for three years built up the church at Ephesus, winning some Jews, and more heathen, to Christianity, but, amidst tears and fond regrets, at parting, in Miletus, from the "presbyters" of a people he so tenderly loved, he had told them that he foresaw the entrance among them, after his departure, of deadly error and wild division. This might, indeed, have been expected, in a city famous not only for its wealth and commerce, but for its affectation of Greek culture, which delighted in subtleties of verbal refinement, and for a painful lightness that turned everything into a jest or an opportunity for displaying fancied wit.[1] At a shortly later time we find Timothy in his place, as its head,[2] but rather as a representative of the apostle, it would seem, than as its "bishop" or overseer; since its elders, or body of presbyters, went to St. Paul at Miletus, as its leaders; no overseer or bishop accompanying them, while the apostle speaks of it as "the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made *them* bishops."[3]

[1] Eph. v. 4; Acts xviii. 19; xix. 1 ff.; xx. 17–38.
[2] 1 Tim. i. 3.
[3] Acts xx. 28, R.V.

The existence of this plurality of bishops makes it difficult to know the precise application of the title "angel," given by our Lord in the Apocalypse to the recipient of his Epistle to each local church. Whatever is meant, the "angels" in each of the seven epistles, are addressed as if they were the churches themselves; receiving praise or blame as if embodiments of the whole membership. Each is addressed as guilty of the faults of the community, and as having earned what commendation is assigned to their good works, so that the "angel" appears rather an ideal personification of the spiritual life of the congregation in its entirety, than any single man or higher being. It is to be remembered that the book is an Apocalypse, and thus peculiar in its style and imagery, so that we cannot apply to it any analogies drawn from other Scriptures. By some, however, these "angels" are imagined to be the celestial representatives or guardians of the churches; the majesty of Christ in the Vision, which carries us up to the highest heavens, being thought to justify this view, and it is further urged in its support, that "angels" play a great part in the book; there being angels of the waters, of the winds, of fire, and of the abyss.[1]

Others have regarded the angels of the churches as the recognised priests of each congregation, relying on the words of Malachi: "The priest is the messenger (or angel) of the Lord of Hosts;"[2] a dignity without question rightly ascribed to the ambassador from God to man. But since the elders, at Miletus, are authoritatively stated to be the divinely-appointed bishops of the church at Ephesus, and, as such, may be fairly assumed to indicate the constitution of the churches in those early

[1] Rev. xvi. 5; vii. 1; xiv. 18; ix. 11. [2] Mal. ii. 7

days, there is no one to whom the title of priest or single overseer could apply. The name "priest," moreover, in the Jewish sense, is never used in the New Testament, of the Christian elders or overseers, that is, bishops. And, in any case, the priest was not guilty of the sins of the congregation, nor entitled to the praise of their varied graces.

Another idea has been, that the name "angel was used as an equivalent to the subordinate official of the synagogue, who rendered services of many kinds to the priests, Levites, and the head of the synagogue, besides taking charge of the minor business of the synagogue generally.[1] This comprehensive office, discharged in earlier times by a duly qualified member of the presbyters or elders, who thus became the mouthpiece of the congregation in prayer, and in reading the Scriptures—was gradually committed to an official specially appointed to it, who was then called Shĕbach Hatzibbur—that is, the messenger, or representative of the congregation; acting also as the secretary or "scribe" of the synagogue. He had also to call on the priest to give the benediction. On New Year's Day he blew the trumpet then sounded, and on fast-days he strewed the ashes on the heads of the penitent assembly, besides discharging many other duties of various kinds. It was deemed necessary, therefore, that he should be a man of special gifts, of blameless life, well versed in the Scriptures, used to lead in prayer, of ripe years, with a good voice, not rich, and the father of a large family. His importance grew with the development of the synagogue worship throughout the nation everywhere, and with the gradual sinking of Hebrew

[1] Buxtorff, Lex. 1411.

into a dead language; he becoming, thus, the interpreter of the Lessons to the people.[1] But, apart from its being doubtful whether this subordinate assisted in New Testament times, he could, at best, only represent the humble deacon, not the leader of the congregation. Nor does it help matters if the name "angel" be held to refer to the presbyters as a body, including the deacons, for they certainly could not be blamed or praised for the sins or merits of the whole church, or addressed as if they were the whole brotherhood. On these various grounds I cannot but think that the "angel," in each case, is only a highly-wrought symbol or personification of the different churches or congregations as a whole; this use being natural among people accustomed to the idea of the rabbis, apparently borrowed from Daniel, that each community, whether a State or a smaller entity, had a presiding angel as its prince, who was virtually identified with it.[2]

From the Ignatian letters it is clear that there were churches in many other places than those to which the epistles are addressed; for instance, in Magnesia and Tralles; the former only about fourteen miles from Ephesus, on the great eastern road which came into it from the south; the latter, about twenty miles east of Magnesia, on the same high-road; so that the seven churches named, must be taken as standing for all the churches collectively: the warnings and exhortations being, doubtless, more or less applicable to them all. While, moreover, each epistle has details of its own, the

[1] Rosch., *Hasch.* 4. 9; *Gem.* f. 33; Vitringa, *Synag.* p. 903; Schoettgen, *Hor. Heb. ad Apoc.* ii. 1; Zimz, *Ritus.* 6.

[2] Dan. viii. 16; x. 1 ff.; xii. 1.

one aim is evident throughout; to prepare the brethren, everywhere, for the speedy coming of the Lord, which is the one great subject of the book.

II. 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: 2. I know thy works—the "fruits" of thy spiritual life[1]—and thy toil in Christian effort of all kinds, and the patience with which thou carriest them out with all endurance, and that thou canst not bear evil men, who walk contrary to the truth, either in life or doctrine, and didst try them who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false—men who, like the false apostles at Corinth,[2] give themselves out as sent forth by our Lord Himself, not from the church at Jerusalem;[3] 3. and thou hast patience, and didst bear for My name's sake, and hast not grown weary, as they have. 4. Yet I have this against thee, that thou hast left the glow of thy first love of God and His Christ. 5. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works—works then inspired by the fervour of that early love—not, as now, merely formal and cold; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. 6. But this thou hast to thy praise, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches as a whole.—To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

The Nicolaitans have been fancied by some, with no reason beyond the name of the sect, to have sprung from the Deacon Nicolas, a proselyte to Judaism, from Antioch, mentioned in Acts, and commended as a man "full of the Spirit and of wisdom.[4] But the baleful memory of having

[1] Matt. vii. 16.
[2] 2 Cor. xi. 13 ff.
[3] 1 Cor. i. 12.
[4] Acts vi. 3, 5.

introduced into the churches corruptions as gross as those attributed to this worthy, is unjust; for there can be no doubt from the mention of the Nicolaitans along with a sect which held doctrines stigmatised as "the teaching of Balaam,"[1] that the two were alike in their character, and akin to the followers of the woman called Jezebel, mentioned soon after.[2] The Nicolaitans, in fact, appear to have been heathen-minded sensualists, who took advantage of St. Paul's doctrine of Christian liberty, to riot in impurity, and to coquet with heathenism; "eating things sacrificed to idols, and committing fornication."[3]

The danger to the future of the faith from such perversions of Christianity, was portentous. Society was everywhere diseased. Superstitions from all quarters flourished alongside the bitterest and most unprincipled scepticism, while the half-savagery of the frontier provinces, the demoralisation caused by the long and terrible civil wars, and the general dissoluteness marking a prurient civilisation, stimulated everywhere the play of the fiercest passions, and the excesses of the most shameless sensuality. Tainted more or less by these surroundings, Christianity had become, even before the time of the Apocalypse, partly with justice, but, much more, from the unfounded slanders of its enemies, a byword amongst even the better spirits of the day, for licentiousness and fanaticism; the hatred roused by it, from its hostility to prevailing vices, no less than the injury done by licentious sects which had sprung up bearing the name of Christians, causing it to be regarded, even in the age of Nero, as "a hateful superstition," disgraced by the "shameful and abominable crimes" of those professing it.[4] Nor did even

[1] Rev. ii. 14, 15. [2] Rev. ii. 20. [3] Rev. ii. 14. [4] Tac. *Ann.* xv. 44.

the apostles fail to condemn in the strongest language, the monstrous abuses which threatened to paralyse their efforts. They speak of the "working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders;" of "seducing spirits and teachings of demons, who speak lies and hypocrisy, and have their consciences seared with a hot iron."[1] They denounce the followers of these heretics as

Site of Temple of Diana, Ephesus. *(From a Photograph by H. G. Powell, Esq.)*

"the synagogue of Satan," and their leaders as "the false prophet," and the "antichrists,"[2] and accuse them, as we have seen, of the lewdness of Balaam and Jezebel.

The centre of this putrefying debasement of the faith was Ephesus, with its mingling of Western and Oriental

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 9; 1 Tim. iv. 1.
[2] Rev. ii. 9, 13; xvi. 13; xvii. 13; 1 John ii. 18.

races, its schools of magic, its great Diana temple, its large population of Jews, not a few of whom got their bread by a pretence of magic powers and arts, and its vast populace, so densely ignorant and wildly superstitious as we see from the piles of booklets of charms and spells burned, during Paul's residence in the city, by converts to Christianity, and by the uproar against him, in connection with his supposed attacks on Diana worship. His forecast of the cloudy future before the local church was, therefore, fully justified. No wonder that in such a city, and amidst such a moral fermentation, an epistle to the church at Ephesus should be needed.

It is striking to notice the persistence of the figure of the Tree of Life, in the religious imagery of widely-separated countries and ages. India has the Soma tree, guarded by genii armed with the lightnings, and the Sacred Tree plays a great part in the legends of Western Asia. In Ecclesiasticus, which dates from about two hundred years before Christ, the blessed "receive the fruit of the tree of immortality,"[1] and in the second book of Esdras, written about the same time as the Apocalypse, Israel is to "have the tree of life for a smell of ointment, and they shall neither labour nor be weary."[2]

Smyrna, to which the second Epistle is addressed, is still an important city. It lies on the south side of a splendid bay, on which navies could float securely; the island of Scio rising, in the distance, to the west. It is about half-way down the west side of Asia Minor, and, as I have said, about thirty-two miles north of Ephesus, and has a population of about 200,000, made up of a medley of nationalities which perhaps fairly reflects its character

[1] Ecclus. xix. 9. [2] 2 Esdras ii. 12

in the first century, when the sway of Rome attracted people of all races, to take advantage of its trading importance, just as they are attracted to it to-day, in spite of the rule of the Turk. The community embraces 50,000 Mahommedans, 80,000 Greeks, 30,000 Armenians, and perhaps 40,000 French, Italians, English, Germans, Austrians, and other Europeans; these last, from their birth

Smyrna. (*From a Photograph by H. G. Powell, Esq.*)

or mixed blood, being known as Levantines. It is nevertheless so much a Greek town, that Greek, more or less pure, is spoken by all but the Mahommedans. A Greek an Armenian, and a Roman Catholic Archbishop watch over their respective flocks, and consuls of many governments protect their fellow-subjects. A line of showy cafés and hotels, mixed with other buildings, rising along

the water front, hides the streets behind, but, beyond the business city, a pleasant suburb climbs the hills which form the near background. As in other Eastern cities, the bazaars,—a network of narrow, ill-paved, dirty lanes,—form the great business centre; Smyrna being now the main seat of interchange of European and Asiatic wares and products. Everything is sold in these dismal quarters, and they doubtless give a fair picture, in the unchanging East, of the Smyrna of the days of the Apostles. The recesses that serve for shops have no windows; their wares or goods being displayed in the mean and narrow open fronts; the proprietor often sitting among his treasures, smoking, or reading the Koran. In one "shop" are a hundred kinds of spices, laid out in small bowls, on rows of very poor shelves. The next may sell ancient armour, or it may be a jeweller's, a money-broker's, an ironmonger's, a goldsmith's, a carpet-dealer's, a draper's, or a saddler's. The butchers alone seemed to keep to one locality, which was a great mercy, for their shops, anywhere, are not attractive to mere sightseers, and are simply revolting in the East. There is so little display, however, that it is hard to think of the city as the commercial emporium it is. The Armenians and the Jews have each their own quarters in the Turkish town, which lies behind the bazaars, at the foot of the hills; many thin minarets rising in this part, and giving picturesqueness to the tame foreground. The Government buildings, the barracks, and the prison are, also, found here, but none of these are noteworthy, and none of the mosques can be called fine, while the Moslem prayer-houses and Dervish convents are poor places. Eight churches, several convents and synagogues, many lodging-houses, rude

enough, according to our ideas; some baths, and many coffee-houses, complete the sights of the town.

To aid the restoration, in the mind, of the ancient Smyrna one has to add that, at the present time, the exports include cotton, huge acorn-cups, drugs, opium, leeches, figs, raisins, and other fruits, silk, wool, hides, carpets, cloth, and small wares; in the sale of all which, and doubtless much more, the bustling population which included the Christians to whom the Epistle in the Apocalypse was addressed, were also engaged from morning to night.

The situation of Smyrna is very fine; an amphitheatre of hills and mountains girding in the wide shores of the bay, on all sides, while the waters themselves lend it a never-wearying charm. Camels lie silently in the streets, or trudge on under bulky loads, but though, here and there, one meets Oriental costume, European dress is much more common; the red tarboosh, however, having a monopoly of fashion for the head. Nor are the women veiled; indeed I do not remember seeing one thus covered up. Such, very probably, was the character of the community two thousand years ago; the dress and, we may presume, the customs, of the West, largely prevailing. The ancient city must have been much finer, however, than the present one, for its streets were broad and handsome, well paved, and ran at right angles, and there were a number of squares and porticoes, a public library, a museum, a stadium in which Olympic games were celebrated with great enthusiasm, a grand music-hall or Odeium, a Homereion, and many temples, of which the most famous was that of the Olympian Jupiter, in which the reigning emperor was practically the god worshipped; Smyrna, like Asia Minor generally, being devoted to that servile

idolatry. But, strange to say, the city had the evil reputation of being undrained, and the rains strewed the streets with the refuse of the houses and markets, so that it could not have been either clean or healthy.[1] Yet it boasted of a boulevard, known as the Golden, extending from the temple of the Mother of Sipylos—the parent city of Smyrna—quite across the town to the temple of Jupiter. From this and other embellishments it had the name of being one of the finest cities in "Asia," which implies that it must, as a whole, have been very magnificent. Indeed it contended with Ephesus and Pergamos for the glory of being finer than they.

By whom the Christian Church in it was founded is not known, but doubtless it was, at least indirectly, one of the fruits of Paul's labours in these regions.

The Epistle to the Church in Smyrna.

8. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write.

These things that follow, saith the First and the Last, who was dead and lived again: 9. I know thy tribulation[2] and thy poverty, for God has chosen the weak and base and despised things of the world—things beneath men's notice, as they think, to be His sons,[3]—but thou art in reality, rich, in possessing the gospel, and I know the blasphemy against My Name, of them who say they are Jews and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

No particulars respecting the Jews in Smyrna survive, beyond an inscription;[4] but such a money-making city must have abounded with them. Insanely proud of their claim to be the people of God, and fanatically zealous,

[1] Strabo.
[2] Chap. i. 9.
[3] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.
[4] Schürer, ii. 365.

alike in watching the interests of their faith, and in seeking proselytes, to be upholders of the presently-expected political revolution under the triumphant Jewish Messiah, they not only scorned Christianity, as a religion offered to the heathen as well as their own race, but hated the Christians as rivals. Everywhere, blasphemies against

Prison of Polycarp on the hill at Smyrna. (*From a Photograph by Rev. Dr. F. Tremlett.*)

Jesus, and shameful calumnies against His followers excited the authorities to suspicion, or even active persecution. Tumults, raised by these bitter enemies, continually disturbed the public peace; the blame for them being systematically laid on the Christians, as men who turned the world upside down;[1] a charge which must have

[1] Acts xvii. 6 ff.

been specially serious, at a time when the Roman authorities were growing alarmed and distrustful, on account of the state of things in Judæa. They called their synagogue a synagogue of God, but John denounces it as a synagogue of Satan; their hostility to the truth showing them to be *his* servants, not the servants of Jehovah. Nor did their frantic hatred quiet down as years passed, for it was by Jewish incitement that Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was done to death, some time between A.D. 147 and A.D. 175. Indeed, even now, when the Apocalypse was being written, and Jerusalem was still standing, they were growing more and more fierce; stirring up, as we presently learn, a local persecution which brought the horrors of a Roman jail and even martyrdom,[1] on some Smyrna Christians.

10. Fear not the things which thou shalt suffer: behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that your faith may be put to the proof by him; in hopes of tempting you from it; and ye shall have tribulation for ten days, that is, for a brief time. You may, indeed, be called to lay down your lives, but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the victor's crown of life. 11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the seven churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second, eternal, death, after that of the body.[2]

The city of Pergamum or Pergamos, was the capital of the kingdom of the same name, till it was incorporated in the Roman Empire and made a Roman province, under the name of "Asia," one hundred and thirty-one years before Christ. It still survives as the modern Bergamah; a very poor place, amidst the hovels, burial-grounds, khans, and mosques of which one meets the ruins of triumphal arches and bridges,

[1] Verses 10, 13. [2] Matt. x. 28; Rev. xx. 6, 14; xxi. 8.

a palace, an amphitheatre, and much else, scattered over a wide circuit; the ghosts of a magnificence long departed. Lying on the navigable stream of the Caicus, three miles from the sea, the ancient city was embosomed among hills, the highest of which, in the city limits, became its acropolis, and was crowned by a strong castle,—the storehouse of the immense treasures of Lysimachus, one of the high

Pergamos.

officers attached to the personal staff of Alexander the Great, and virtual founder of Pergamos. Below this, facing the south-east of the acropolis, there is still a wall of hewn granite at least a hundred feet high, let into the rock behind, supporting vast substructions, once forming a platform for a temple of Jupiter, which was unrivalled for grandeur of situation; being visible, at once from the vast

plain of the Caicus valley, and from the Ægean Sea. Nor was it less famous for the splendour of its architecture, though the Christians of the Apostolic age looked on it with horror, as now given up to the worship of the Roman emperor, whose statue was erected in it and worshipped; making the temple, in their eyes, the very "throne of Satan," of whom the emperor, thus deified, was to them the visible incarnation. There was, besides, a famous temple of Esculapius, already ancient, on the slopes of the acropolis, visited from far and near as a great health resort; dreams being, as was believed, granted by the god to those consulting his shrine, while medical advice and skill were supplied by the priests. The city was still, in the second century, a town of 120,000 inhabitants; the centre of a taxing district, and of a Roman seat of justice, with a mint for local money; enjoying an extensive commerce, from lying at the point where all the roads met which ran through western Asia Minor. Yet it was not so much a business city, like Ephesus or Corinth, as, in a way, a union of a pagan cathedral city, a university town, and a royal residence, adorned, for generations, by a succession of kings who had a taste for splendour. Two tributaries of the Caicus flowed round the town on its two sides, before uniting with the main stream, and thus enabled the citizens to embellish the streets and suburbs with every charm of garden and ornamental planting; making it without a rival for beauty in the province. A grove of surpassing beauty sheltered temples to Jupiter, Athene, Apollo, Dionysus, and Aphrodite, whose worship was another word for lawless sensuality, and it boasted, in addition, a noble town-hall, a theatre, a gymnasium, and a stadium, the grandeur of which those may fancy who have seen the new stadium

just opened at Athens; an amphitheatre, and other public buildings, also adding to the general splendour. But it had, as well, its cockpits: for cock-fighting was one of the passions of the citizens. Its pottery was in great repute, and parchment got its name from Pergamos being the place where it was first made. Originally prepared to gratify the passion of one of its kings for literature, it gradually furnished a vast library with, it is said, 200,000 volumes or "rolls," but this splendid collection had been given by Antony to Cleopatra, that her library at Alexandria might have no rival, and that library had been burnt when Cæsar stormed the Egyptian city; 400,000 "rolls," we are told, being destroyed.

To this magnificent city the next Epistle was addressed, mingling "a few things" of blame in the local Christians, with commendation for general worth. Already in Philo's day[1] Jews were to be found, in great numbers, in every town of Proconsular Asia;[2] some of them, it is believed, so far back as three centuries and a half before Christ, and while they had all become Greek in speech, not a few had also become so in spirit.[3] Specially favoured by Cæsar, they had inherited the right to manage their own affairs, and to hold their own courts for Jewish offences, while also free from military service. Enjoying such immunities and privileges, their genius for getting good places had raised many of them to lucrative posts, such as that of chief farmers of the taxes, and the like, and their commercial instincts had won them marked success in countless other

[1] Philo appears to have been born about sixteen years before Christ, and lived to old age, so that he was a later contemporary of our Lord.

[2] Philo, *Legat. ad Caium.* 33; *Mang.* ii. 582.

[3] Jos. *cont. Apion.* i. 22.

ways of money-making. But this prosperity, amidst a friendly pagan community, had led, too often, to unwholesome results in their religion and morals. Visionary, and not seldom immoral views, borrowed from Oriental systems then preached by wandering mystagogues, had been largely accepted, and, through these Jewish converts to them, had found supporters among the Christians, some of whom had learned, in this way, what are called, interchangeably, "the doctrines of Balaam," or "of the Nicolaitans." Adopting these, they had become so far pagan as to "eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication;" sinning thus, apparently, on the principle of modern Antinomians, that, as Christians, they were safe, and could use their "Christian liberty" without danger. But Christ tells them that the sharp two-edged sword which proceeds out of His mouth[1] would be used against those who sinned thus, "that grace might abound." The bulk of the local Christians, however, had "held fast by His Name, and had not denied His faith," even when one of their number had been put to death for his fidelity; this martyr being, perhaps, not alone, since Eusebius gives us the names of three others who, he says, also shed their blood as witnesses for Christ in those evil days;[2] their crime, we may feel certain, having been, the refusal to worship the Beast, that is, the emperor; then, Nero. That the eating things sacrificed to idols is put on the same grade, as a sin, with fornication, indicates meanwhile, the ideas of a strict Jewish Christian, and recalls the much more forbearing views of St. Paul on such subjects. The closing promises of future eternal glory, it will be noticed, are varied in this Epistle from those given to the Christians of Ephesus

[1] Rev. i. 16. [2] Euseb. *Hist. Evan.* iv. 15.

and Smyrna. Instead of "eating of the tree of life," or having "the crown of life," they are to eat of the "hidden manna;" a phrase derived, perhaps, from the Jewish belief that King Josiah, or the prophet Jeremiah, at the destruction of Solomon's Temple, hid the ark and the pot of manna, with the other wonders of the Holy of Holies, to save them from Nebuchadnezzar's army. These had, in the end, it was fancied, been carried up to heaven, and would be returned to earth again under the kingdom of the Messiah, which was to be set up in Jerusalem. Yet, the expression may simply mean that they should eat angel's food;[1] manna being used by Christ Himself as a symbol of the heavenly "bread" with which, as Messiah, He nourished His followers.[2] They were, moreover, to receive a "white stone" and "a new name;" mystic emblems which speak of their future reward. They would draw from the urn of destiny the "white stone" which, in their every-day life, marked good fortune, and in their case, indicated the favour of God: this stone, moreover, securing them entrance to the joys of the kingdom of the Messiah, as a similar one, here, admitted to festivities or public rejoicings. The new name to be given to him who overcomes, will, we are told, be written on this, but will remain a secret to him till he enters on his eternal bliss. It is, thus, new, since it will be known, first, only after death; no human word being able to express the glories heaven will reveal; and it is known only to him who receives it, for the soul alone realises its own felicity. It is curious, however, to remember, as showing the recurrence, in John's mind, of the imagery of the ancient Scriptures, that the giving "a new name" had

[1] Ps. lxxviii. 25. [2] John vi. 31, 32.

already been promised in Isaiah, to the Israel of the Return;[1] the people being called Hephzibah, and the land, Beulah. The adoption of the new name of Christians by the converts at Antioch had, indeed, already familiarised the idea.[2]

Epistle to the Church in Pergamos.

12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write;
These things saith He that hath the sharp two-edged sword: 13. I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast My name, and didst not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel; to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. 15. So hast thou, also, some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. 16. Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

The separate mention of the doctrine or teaching of Balaam, and that of the Nicolaitans, shows that, though alike in their leading features, the two sects were by no means identical. That the Greek name "Nicolaos" corresponds in meaning with the Hebrew word "Bilam," or "Balaam," has been fancied by some to imply that they were the same, but it may simply mean that the name

[1] Isa. lxii. 2; lxv. 15. [2] Acts xi. 26.

was given to the Nicolaitans from that of the heresiarch, now otherwise unknown, from whom they sprang.

Thyatira, to which the next Epistle is addressed, was a town of no special distinction, about fifty miles, south-west by west, from Pergamos, in a plain on the river Lycus. It was a Macedonian colony, which explains the presence of Lydia in Philippi, with which city Thyatira would necessarily stand in the friendliest relations. It was famous for its purple dyeworks, and its position on the trade road opened by the Romans between Sardis and Pergamos, gave it commercial and military importance. It belonged to the judicial district of Pergamos. Remains of ancient splendour lie broadcast over its site, many fragments of marble pillars still remaining; not a few converted into drinking troughs for flocks and cattle, or put at the mouth of wells. The town still contains about 24,000 inhabitants, and, in the lazy Turkish way, has some business, but nothing in comparison to what it should have in such a glorious situation, with its flowing waters, its embaying hills, and its splendid climate.

By whom the church in Thyatira had been founded is not told us, for the greatest benefactors of mankind have, as a rule, little more reward on earth than the consciousness of having tried to do their duty. Was it Lydia, returning to her own town, who sowed the seeds in it of the faith she had so zealously embraced at Philippi? In any case, the brotherhood evidently consisted mainly of heathen converts, for it is hard to imagine pure Jews as eating things sacrificed to idols.[1] Jesus, who speaks through John, had already been described by him as seen,

[1] Ver. 20.

THYATIRA (*from a Photograph*).

in vision, as "like unto a son of man," but with eyes as a flame of fire, and feet like burnished brass.[1] Now, however, while repeating this He calls Himself expressly, "the Son of God," as was fitting, since He is about to threaten the local evil-doers with the terrors of His divine power.[2] His flame-like eyes pierce through all things, as the awful Judge, and His feet, like shining brass, will tread to dust all that is unholy or opposed. He has much to praise, for He knows their works of many kinds—their love to God and man, their faith, their service in all ministries in the church and the community, and their patient endurance; in all which they were steadily advancing, since their latest works were more than the first. They were, however, guilty of suffering a corrupting teacher —a woman,—whom He denounces by the hateful name of Jezebel, the introducer of Baal worship into Israel,—to lead some of their number astray. She even claimed to be "a prophetess," that is, in the sense in which the word was used in apostolic days, one who spoke under a divine impulse, revealing deeper aspects of the truth, communicated directly from God. Her teaching is said to be the same as that of the sects already so sternly condemned, and her guilt was aggravated by her not having repented, though time had been graciously allowed her to do so. For all this, she would be thrown on a bed of sickness, instead of wicked grossness, while those who followed her in her unholy teaching would be visited with great tribulation, unless they repented of their participation in her immoral doctrines. Jesus would, indeed, kill them by the "plague" or "pestilence,"[3] and all the churches, far and

[1] Rev. i. 14, 15. [2] See ver. 27, compared with Ps. ii. 9.
[3] Rev. vi. 8; xviii. 8; Jer. xiv. 12; xxi. 6, 7; Ezek. xxxiii. 27.

near, would know that He who thus threatened and punished, was He who searches the reins and hearts, and is thus able, by His omniscience, to give every one of them according to their works, whether good or evil. The faithful in Thyatira, though they may know much of the deep things of God, know nothing of those deep things of the devil, taught by this woman. She has pretended to special insight or "gnosis," but it has revealed only the secrets of the pit to her, not of heaven—and He will, therefore, cast on the brethren no other burden than the abstaining from eating things sacrificed to idols, and from fornication, as laid down in the decree of the Jerusalem conference.[1] They must, however, hold fast what they have of the truth, till He come, and then He will give to him who does so, a share in the authority over the heathen nations which He has received from His Father; ruling them with Him—in the words of the Psalm,[2] with an iron mace, and shivering them in pieces, when they oppose Him, as the clay vessels of the potter are shattered by a blow. Nor is this all. He will also give him who overcomes, the morning star—so that they will shine with Him, in the same glory as Himself; for He Himself is "the bright and the morning star."[3] Startling as this appears, it is only what is often repeated in the New Testament;[4] our Lord, the apostles, and the Apocalypse alike dwelling on this special exaltation of true Christians in the kingdom of the Messiah, then conceived as close at hand. It is worthy of note, moreover, that the angels of the churches are all addressed directly, as independent, without any mention of a central authority.

[1] Acts xv. 29. [2] Ps. ii. 8, 9.
[3] 1 John iii. 2; Rev. xxii. 16.
[4] Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 29, 30; 1 Cor. vi. 3; Rev. iii. 21; xx. 4.

Epistle to the Church at Thyatira.

18. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write;
These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like unto burnished brass
19. I know thy works and thy love, and faith, and ministry to the saints, and patience, and that thy last works are even more than the first. 20. But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, speaking as from God; and she teaches and seduces My servants to commit fornication, and to eat, at home, or at supper-parties of friends, sometimes idolaters, or at feasts in the precincts of idol-temples, things sacrificed to idols. 21. And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. 22. Behold, I throw her into a sick-bed, and them that commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. 23. And I will kill her children with death, that is, the plague; and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the reins and hearts: and I will give to each one of you according to your works. 24. But to you I say, that is, to the rest of the brethren in Thyatira,—as many as have not embraced this teaching, and who thus know not the deep things of Satan, as they say they do, for though they call them the deep things of God, I call them the deep things of the devil; I cast upon you no other burden than the truth already delivered to you. 25. Howbeit, that which ye have, hold fast till I come—for I come shortly. 26. And then he that overcometh, and he that keepeth My works to the end, to him will I give authority over the heathen nations: 27. and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received appointment to do of My Father:[1]
28. and I will give him the morning star.[2] 29. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

[1] Ps. ii. 8, 9.

[2] In Isa. xiv. 12, Babylon is called Lucifer—the Shining One, or the

Sardis, to which the next Epistle is addressed, though now only a mean hamlet, in the midst of widespread ruins, was, in the first century, a city of great importance. It lay on a fruitful plain, glorified, as usual in Western Asia Minor, by a background of noble mountains. Its site was, indeed, at the foot of the northern side of these, and enclosed, as its acropolis or citadel, an almost inaccessible rock, standing out, singularly, from them: fragments of the triple walls of this fortress still remaining. Sardis had been the capital of the Lydian monarchy till taken by the Persians under Cyrus, in A.D. 549; its last king having been Crœsus, famed for his wealth. The ruins of a stadium, a town-hall, a temple of Cybele, the local Diana, an open-air theatre, and two grand pillars of the old palace, still bear witness to the luxury and splendour of the ancient city. The streamlet Pactolus, with its once gold-bearing sand, still murmurs northwards across the silent plain, on its course from the long mountain range of Tmolus, to the river Hermus; these mountains bending in a gentle arc, of which the highest swell looked down on Sardis at its feet; the Hermus gliding westward, five miles off, on the north side of the walls, while the vast necropolis of early ages still shows itself on the other side of the stream, by countless burial mounds. Roads from Pergamos, Smyrna, and Ephesus met at Sardis, and others branched off from it in various

Morning Star, as having, in its pride, vaunted, in the poetical language of the prophet, to "ascend into heaven," and there "exalt his throne above the stars of God," the deities of its national worship, "and to sit on the mountain of the assembly"—of these gods—the Babylonian Olympus, which is "in the recesses of the north." In the Apocalypse the name of the Morning Star is transferred to Him who has, truly, not in vain boast, done all this.

SARDIS: REMAINS OF OLD CHURCH (*from a Photograph*).

directions, bringing it into close communication with all parts of the country; for Asia Minor was then as marked by its teeming population, its many towns, cities, and villages, and its great prosperity, as it now is by the dismal opposite of all these. The city lay about sixty miles, in a straight line, south-east from Pergamos, about fifty miles east of Smyrna, and nearly the same distance north-east of Ephesus. The houses being for the most part thatched with reeds, it had repeatedly been more or less destroyed by fire, and so recently as in the reign of Tiberius, had been so injured by a great earthquake, that it was only rebuilt by a grant of imperial assistance.[1] Its pride and luxury as the capital of a plutocrat like Crœsus, and then of the Persian satraps, had, for centuries, become a byword. In such a busy trade centre there were, of course, Jews in large numbers; not a few enjoying the honour of Roman citizenship, while very many were freemen of the city. They were allowed to govern themselves, subject to the laws, by their own customs and authorities, and they had full liberty of worship. Indeed there is still extant, in Josephus, a municipal vote of the town council, granting them an assigned place for "building and dwelling in."[2] As a military centre, its position gave Sardis more importance than any other place in Asia. After the fall of the Persian Empire it had become the seat of the viceroys of the Syro-Greek kings, but it afterwards rather faded before the glories of Pergamos. Yet it boasted of a mint, was an assize town, and had the rank of a "metropolis." Of the origin of the local church we know nothing, but churches must, in those days, have sprung up in many places which no apostles had visited,

[1] Strabo, lib. xii. [2] Jos. *Ant.* xiv. 14, 24.

since access to the synagogue in the first days of Christianity gave its missionaries an opportunity of "preaching the word" or "proclaiming the Christ"[1] everywhere. Even women, indeed, as we have seen in the case of the one denounced as Jezebel, at Thyatira, and in the daughters of St. Philip, at Hierapolis, were very effective propagandists.

Epistle to the Church in Sardis.

III. 1. And to the angel of the church in Sardis write;

These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, the angels of the presence, or the sevenfold graces and energies of the Holy Ghost, exhorting, punishing, warning, comforting, and promising, and who has also the seven stars, the angels of the seven churches, in His right hand, as His own, to guard, to sustain, to rule.[2] I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and yet thou art dead. 2. Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain,—those graces thou still possessest, and those members of the church still faithful; things and persons which were ready to die when I searched into your state:[3] for I have found no works of thine full, to the measure required before My God. 3. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received, and didst hear, for thou didst hear with holy zeal, which has now cooled down, and keep it, henceforth, and repent having lost it. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief,[4] and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 4. But thou hast a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments by following the Nicolaitans, or falling into other sin: and they shall walk with Me in My kingdom in white garments, for they are worthy, and white robes are the array of the blessed, and symbols of perfected holiness and victory, fitting their entrance to the presence of God;

[1] Acts viii. 4, 5.
[2] Rev. i. 4, 16, 20.
[3] Rev. ii. 18.
[4] Matt. xxiv. 42 ff.

for robes of honour are always given those admitted to see the face of the kings of earth, and how much more to those who are to behold the King eternal? 5. He that overcometh, fighting the good fight of faith victoriously to the end, shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.[1] 6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Philadephia, to which the next Epistle is addressed, was a city of Lydia, named after its founder, Attalus Philadelphus, King of Pergamos. It lay about thirty miles nearly east of Sardis, on the same high-road, in a broad fruitful valley which was a continuation of the great plain through which the Hermus glides westwards, along the foot of the ranges of Tmolus and Sipylus; to fall into the bay of Smyrna, at its northern edge. It was a rich, flourishing, splendid city, known as "Little Athens" from its love of learning. Under the Romans it was the centre of a taxing district, and an assize town, honoured to have the provincial festivals held in it, in its turn, as belonging to the province of "Asia." It is still a pretty large, though mean town; the ruins in and round it, showing how far it has fallen from its ancient prosperity. Situated in an actively-volcanic district, it frequently suffered from violent earthquakes, which required its being more or less rebuilt: indeed, it had been destroyed in the great convulsion in the reign of Tiberius.[2] Parts

[1] Ps. lxix. 28; Exod. xxxii. 32, 33; Dan. xii. 1. The Jews had, from these passages, come to the belief that all the good works of each Jew were written down in heavenly books, his judgment at the last day being decided from that record. (Enoch xcviii. 7–8; civ. 7, 89, 90. The Book of Jubilees, in Ewald's *Jahrbuch*, iii. 38.)

[2] Tac. *Ann.* ii. 47.

of its ancient walls are still standing, and the ruins of twenty-four churches witness to its having long been faithful to Christ.

A small and poor but true-hearted church had been

Philadelphia.

founded here, it is not said by whom or how early, but, like the church at Smyrna, it had much to bear from the ill-will of the local Jews. Its fidelity was now rewarded and honoured, in loving recognition of the past, and as a stimulus to continued loyalty to their faith in the future.

Their blaspheming and insulting enemies, the Jews of the city, who were indeed, they are told, only Jews in name; belonging not, as they claimed, to the synagogue of God, but to that of the devil: would, in part, at least, be won over to Christianity by the proofs shown in the lives of the local brethren that Christ, the speaker, loves them, though so reviled. They would see, moreover, that instead of His being, as they had shamefully asserted, an impostor and a crucified malefactor, He is indeed the holy and true Messiah, to whom, as such, had been committed "the key of David;" supreme authority in the kingdom of God,—symbolised as that new "kingdom of heaven," to be set up at His coming,—being committed to His rule; to admit to it or shut out from it, whom He judged worthy or the reverse. The brethren and the Jews would alike understand, at once, what was meant by "the key of David;" their familiarity with the ancient Scriptures, through constantly hearing them read in the synagogue and the Christian assembly, doubtless making them remember the incident in Isaiah, in which the key of "the house," or "palace" of David is taken from Shebna, the high prefect of the palace, through whom alone any one could be admitted to it. The words used of the transfer were in fact, identical with those now used by Christ, for it was said in Isaiah, by God, that "He would lay the key of the house of David on the shoulder of Eliakim," the new prefect, as the symbol of his investiture in the office, "so that he shall open, and none shall shut: and he shall shut, and none shall open."[1] As the earthly dignitary had this power in the house of David on Mount Zion, Christ, Himself the David of the spiritual Israel, the kingdom of the

[1] Isa. xxii. 22.

Messiah, had the same authority in the Church—the "house of God." Accepting the invitations of His grace, some even of the Jews would come and worship before the feet of the Philadelphian church, that is, pay it all humble reverence, and thus meekly crave permission to take the modest place of new converts[1] in the assembly. Because the church has patiently clung to its faith, Christ next tells them, He will keep them from the hour of trial, or temptation to fall away, which is to come upon all the world, to test the faithfulness of "them that dwell upon the earth." It had been foretold that dark times of trouble would precede the coming of the Messiah,[2] and, in accordance with this, they would very soon be put to the sore test of being required to worship the Beast, that is, the emperor;[3] greater weight being henceforth laid on their refusing this hated demand; but they would be saved out of all, and, moreover, He, Jesus, would shortly appear, and when He came—if they had held fast to the truth, letting no man rob them of their promised crown, by leading them to apostatise,—they would be made a pillar in the temple of God,—the glorified Church—and have the name of the city of God written on them—the New Jerusalem,—as its citizens, and as belonging to God Himself for ever,—when the Holy City came down from heaven, from God:[4] that city which had no temple in it; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb being its temple.[5] And, further, they would have Christ's own new name written on them, as of the number of those given to Him by the Father.

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 16. [2] Matt. xxiv. 21–24.
[3] Rev. xiii. 14–17. [4] Rev. xxi. 2.
[5] Rev. xxi. 22.

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.

7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;
These things saith He that is holy, He that is true,—not what the unbelieving blasphemously say,—who has the key of David, He that opens, and none shall shut; and that shuts, and none opens—admitting or excluding from the kingdom of God, as supreme Judge: 8. I know thy works—behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut; I know thy works, I say, that though thou art weak and poor, thou hast a little power for good, and hast faithfully used it, and didst keep My word and didst not deny My name. These thy faithful works have even influenced thine enemies for good, and as their reward, 9. behold I give thee as converts, some of the synagogue of Satan, of them who say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie: behold, I give thee some of them, and will make them come and worship before thy feet, and know that I have loved thee. 10. Because thou didst keep the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11. I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. 12. He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out thence no more: and, as kings write their names on the pillars of earthly temples, I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God—enrolling him as a citizen, with all its honours and privileges, and I will write on him, My own new name, as of My brethren, and as My own. 13. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Laodicea, in Phrygia, to which the last of the seven Epistles was addressed, named after Laodice, the queen of Antiochus II., was one of the leading cities of the province

of "Asia:" its manufactures and general commerce being so great that when it was destroyed by the memorable earthquake in the year 61, the citizens, proud of their wealth, at once rebuilt it, without any assistance from outside.[1] Indeed, this Epistle to the local Christians implies that even they boasted of their riches; a very unusual thing for the members of a church in those days. Laodicea was one of the three cities already mentioned as close together: the other two being Colosse and Hierapolis, —on the swift waters of the river Lycus, which flow into the Meander. It lay on a long spur of a hill, each side of which is watered by a small stream which presently falls into the hurrying river. A taste for Greek art, created by its wealth, adorned not only its private mansions, but its public buildings and open spaces, with countless statues, and its ruins still show the long-eclipsed magnificence of its architecture, at least in its leading edifices, and it was also famous for its scientific, medical, and literary schools. There were, of course, many Jews in a place so favourable for making money, but they are not mentioned as causing any special trouble to the Christians. Thanks to the barbarism of the Turk, the once splendid city has long ago vanished, and its site has now nothing attractive; dull, barren, round-topped hills, near and far off, adding to the feeling of desolation. Nor do its widely-scattered ruins arrest the eye, for they lie strewn in grey, monotonous wreck. Yet they show the outlines of the old stadium, the gymnasium, and of several theatres, of which one is in excellent preservation. The remains of other buildings are to be seen on the top of the town hill, and the skeleton of a gateway, with traces

[1] Tac. *Ann.* xiv. 27.

LAODICEA: ENTRANCE TO THE STADIUM (*from a Photograph*).

of the city wall, are found to the east. A street running through and out of the old Laodicea, can still be followed; its sides marked by the fragments of a colonnade, and of many pedestals of statues. The whole neighbourhood, in fact, is covered with heaps of stones once belonging to massive buildings; several temples being distinguishable, with the bases of the marble pillars once gracing them. But the landscape, then crowded with population, is now silent; the gardens and walks along the river front where they enjoyed themselves are blotted out; the smoke and the hum of multitudinous industries have died away for more than a millennium. In spite of its recent destruction, the rebuilt city was full of life and more splendid than ever when the Epistle in the Apocalypse came to the brethren, and the thousand distractions of prosperity, while sinking the general community in deeper wickedness than ever, dimmed even the fine gold of local Christianity.

By whom our religion had been brought to this money-loving, would-be-literary, plutocratic community is not known, for it is said by St. Paul, in writing to the neighbouring Colosse, ten miles to the east, on the same great road, that he had not visited either. In all probability, brethren from Ephesus had carried the Gospel to both; the synagogue, as I have said, always offering an easy means of beginning local evangelisation. But, like all the seven churches, except the poorest of them—that of Philadelphia—the fervour with which the new faith had been received soon abated; a cold half-heartedness succeeding, which neither warmly supported the confession they had made, nor quite repudiated it. Hence the Epistle, while loving and tender, in its eagerness that they

should not, after all, forfeit their Christian reward, is stern in its reproof of their unhealthy spiritual condition, and in the demand for sincere and immediate repentance. The solemnity of its first words shows the deep feeling of Christ respecting this state of things. He calls Himself "the Amen, the faithful and true witness," to impress on them the certainty of all He may say—the justice of His reproof, the wisdom of His counsel, and the sure realisation of both His threatenings and His promises.[1] He had already declared Himself "the faithful witness" to the truth,[2] but now He adds that He is "the beginning of the creation of God"—not, assuredly, the first creature of God, but the living fountain of all creation—its author and beginner, as is taught in every part of the New Testament. How could He, indeed, dictate this book if He Himself were a creature? How could every creature in heaven and earth worship Him?[3] How could He be the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end[4]—that name which is the sole right of the Almighty,[5] if He were only Himself a creature?

Epistle to the Church in Laodicea.

14. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write;

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: 15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot—either openly against Me or warmly for Me. 16. So, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth; casting thee from Me with loathing, unless thou repentest. 17. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have indeed gotten much riches, and have need

[1] Rev. iii. 15–17, 18, 21. [2] Rev. i. 5.
[3] Rev. v. 13. [4] Rev. xxii. 13. [5] Rev. i. 5

of nothing; I am a Christian, but wish to stand well with those that are not; I want a paradise both here and hereafter; and knowest not that, with all thy worldly respectability, thou art the wretched one, above all other churches, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, in soul, before God: therefore 18. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire—the tried gold of sincerity, which I alone can give thee, that thou mayest become spiritually rich; and white garments, the robes of a godly, righteous, and sober life, that thou mayest clothe thyself with them, and that the shame of thy spiritual nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see thy true condition, and what true religion demands. 19. I speak thus in love, for as many as I love, I reprove and chasten, when they need it for their good: be zealous, therefore, in reforming thyself, since I thus love thee still, and repent. 20. Behold I stand at the door, O Church of Laodicea, so near is My coming, and even now, I, as it were, knock at your door—the door of each heart, and if any man hear My voice, calling him to open, and does so, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me—in holy fellowship and love. 21. Still more: he that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne hereafter,[1] as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne. 22. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

[1] Rev. xxii. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 12; Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 30; 1 Cor. vi. 2; Rev. ii. 26, 27.

CHAPTER VIII

PLAN OF THE BOOK AND THE FIRST VISION

WITH the close of the Epistles to the Seven Churches, their members, and, through them, all the brethren, are shown in a series of visions, how all things are working towards the great triumph of Christ, on which, as on a sure foundation, all their hopes are built. The disclosure of the successive steps of God's purposes in securing this, would strengthen the faith and brighten the life of the churches, whatever troubles await them, and thus help them to be true to the end. A brief glance at the contents of the book as a whole, will bring this more distinctly before us.

The visions open by a sublime presentation of the majesty and splendour of God the Father, in the upper heavens; to impress on the churches that the Plan of Redemption, from first to last, is to be ascribed to His infinite love and sovereign good pleasure; Christ, the divine Son, being the agent through whom His purposes of mercy are carried out. The eyes of all the faithful are, therefore, directed to the sublime spectacle of "Him that sitteth upon the throne," hidden amidst its splendour, as he receives the adoration of the "elders," who represent the redeemed of all ages of the past; of "living creatures," who symbolise all animate creation,

and of the innumerable companies of the celestials, of all orders.[1]

The sealed book of the purposes of God towards man is then brought forward, but no one can open it, till the Lamb, our Blessed Lord, appears, amidst a universal recognition that He alone can do so, and disclose its mysteries. Heaven resounds with the acclamations of all its angels, of the elders, and of the symbolic living creatures, when He takes the book from the right hand of God, sitting on the throne; every creature on the earth or under it, or in the sea, joining in universal adoration as He does so.[2]

Six seals are then in succession opened; revealing awful judgments about to be poured out on the earth;[3] the opening of the fifth being attended by a cry, from the souls of the martyrs under the altar before the throne, for vengeance on those who had taken their lives; a prayer to which the remainder of the book is virtually the answer; carrying out their appeal for judgment on their murderers. A pause is now made, till the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads, to ensure their safety in the troubles approaching, and to keep them from falling away under fear and temptation.[4]

The seventh seal is now opened, but is followed by another pause, after which a new series of judgments is introduced, following the echoes of seven trumpets sounded by seven mighty angels. Six of the plagues thus prepared, now overwhelm the heathen world with calamities the most dreadful; but, in spite of them, men do not repent of their sins.[5]

An angel prince now descends, and swears by the ever-

[1] Chap. iv. [2] Chap. v. [3] Chap. vi. [4] Chap. vii. [5] Chaps. viii., ix.

living God, that no more time should be granted the impenitent world.[1]

Another angel, attended by John, next measures Jerusalem, outside the Temple; all except the sanctuary being given over for three years and a half to the heathen, to tread it under foot, for that time. During these years, witnesses testify in the city for God, but are killed. Yet, presently, they are restored to life and taken up to heaven, and a tenth part of the city is destroyed by an earthquake. Unlike the heathen, however, those who escaped "were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven," so that Jerusalem, thus, again, becomes the city of God, and is restored to His favour.[2]

At last, the seventh trumpet sounds, and the final judgments open; heralded by the adoration of the elders, at the avenging of the martyrs by the judgments already inflicted, and at the prospect of the final visitation of divine wrath on the heathen.

Meanwhile, a woman, clothed with the sun, appears in heaven, on the eve of becoming a mother. But a great red dragon also appears there, seeking to devour the child which is born on earth, and is, in fact, the Messiah —Jesus. But He is caught up into heaven, away from the dragon. Meanwhile, the woman, who is now a symbol of the Church, flees to the wilderness, and is fed there for three years and a half, in a place prepared for her by God, and the great dragon, the devil, is finally cast out of heaven; he and his angels being overcome by Michael and his hosts. Nor can he prevail against the woman or the "remnant of her seed."[3]

Another stage in the visions follows. A beast—the

[1] Chap. x. [2] Chap. xi. 1–14. [3] Chap. xii.

Roman power—comes up from the western sea, and all the world wonders after it, and worships the dragon—the devil—who gave it its power. This beast, as the instrument of Satan, makes war against the saints. But presently a second beast rises from the earth—the representative of the army of seducing teachers and sorcerers, who were to seek the destruction of the Church by their evil arts; and, what with the sword and misleading seductions of this "false prophet," the saints are sore pressed, while the world becomes daily more hardened.[1]

The wrath of God is now loosed against the Roman power itself, and, as a beginning, Jerusalem is delivered from the Roman armies, which are scattered with indescribable slaughter.[2]

At this progress of the judgments of God there is renewed adoration in heaven, after which seven other angels receive seven phials full of the wrath of God, which they pour out, with unspeakable ruin to man, and wreckage of the world.[3]

The doom of the great city, Rome, follows, after having been foretold, briefly already, by anticipation.[4] It is utterly destroyed by fire and its site made a desolation.

The beast and the false prophet, with all their supporters, are now taken or destroyed by "The Word of God"—the earth being virtually depopulated, and the beast and the false prophet and those who have their mark are cast into a lake of fire.[5]

The devil is now seized, and bound in the abyss for one thousand years, during which the souls of the martyrs and confessors, clothed with their bodies, which are raised

[1] Chap. xiii. [2] Chap. xiv. [3] Chap. xvi.
[4] Chaps. xvii., xviii. [5] Chap. xix.

from the dead, reign with Christ, in Jerusalem; the rest of the dead not being then raised. This is the first resurrection.

Satan is now loosed from the pit, but forthwith assails the city of the saints. He is, however, crushed, with all the barbarous hosts he has gathered, and is finally cast into the burning lake for ever and ever.

Thus Rome and the heathen world, with the emperor, the false prophet, and the devil, are taken out of the way of the final establishment of the Kingdom of Christ on earth:[1] the whole course of Providence having been directed to that end.

A new earth and a new heaven are now created for the New Kingdom of the Messiah; entrance into which is the grand Christian hope. All the dead are raised and judged: those who have been true to the faith being admitted to the Messianic kingdom, but all others consigned to the burning lake. The New Jerusalem presently descends from heaven; the saints are gathered in it, with the presence of God and the Lamb as its glory, and the book ends, when this grand culmination has been reached, with cries to the Saviour to come quickly, that this reward of His faithful servants may be theirs the sooner.

Thus, from first to last, the Apocalypse is only a vision of the steps in God's purposes, by which Christ will triumph over all His foes, and reign with His people, in a regenerated world, for ever and ever; visions fitted supremely, to support the Christians under their trials.

In the Epistles to the seven churches their condition at the time had been painted, but now, as I have said, the seer begins to speak of the future. As he ponders what

[1] Chap. xx.

destinies it may reveal, the skies seem to open over him in his lonely island retreat, and disclose the glories of the immediate presence of God. The imagery is characteristic of the age; presenting current apocalyptic conceptions of the immediate Chamber of Presence of the Eternal, and of His state and majesty. We must hence guard against understanding the details literally, as if recording actual facts and scenes, instead of the pageantry of visions only. We must remember that we are reading the words of a prophet, and that prophets always write, more or less, in poetical language, bodying forth the revelations vouchsafed them in highly-wrought imagery. Thus only, indeed, can the purposes of God, and His dealings with angels or men be removed from the abstract and pictured to the eye in allegorical creations; as poets in all ages have personified mental and moral and natural phenomena, and clothed them with the attributes and visible presentments of lower or higher life.

In the Apocalypse, moreover, we have to do with a style of composition more or less peculiar to Jewish writers and entirely Eastern in its colouring. Springing up in Western Asia, from the model introduced by Ezekiel, it had become a feature in the literature of every religious crisis since the persecution under Antiochus. The Roman occupation, through Pompey, and the abhorred reign of Herod, had since been marked by writings of this class, and it was inevitable that the Christian churches, so largely Jewish in their membership, and so universally moulded into Jewish modes of thought and forms of expression in their religious life, should crave an Apocalypse to throw light on their gloom under the agony of Nero's reign. Even in later times, indeed, in the crises

of their history under Domitian, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Decius, and the invasion of the Goths in A.D. 250, a similar relief was sought, and successive "Revelations" appeared, and it was the same in the Jewish community. But while the sacred writer confines himself to a pictorial, symbolic, materialising of simple Scriptural teaching, he discards the Jewish or, rather, rabbinical inventions which entirely corrupt that simplicity, by transferring to heaven the state and magnificence of Oriental majesty, familiar to them from their long connection with the Persian monarchy. Thus, while the rabbis surround the Almighty with a celestial council, which shares in His decisions, John represents those before the heavenly throne as only adoring worshippers. Nor does he hint at the rabbinical audacity that all the events and things of earth are first rehearsed, or embodied in archetyes, before the co-assessors with God, and only after this carried out or introduced in this world.

The vision opens immediately after the conclusion of the delivery to John of the Epistles to the seven churches; while he was still "in the Spirit;" that is, in such a trance or ecstasy as we read of in the visions granted to St. Paul or St. Peter,[1] and as is recorded in connection with Balaam,[2] Saul, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the prophets generally,[3] and continues in this state of mental illumination during all the visions that follow, to the end of the book.

Looking upwards, with eyes thus cognisant of things outside the range of the senses, John sees a door opened in the upper heaven, the house or palace of the Almighty,

[1] Acts xxii. 17; x. 10. [2] Num. xxiv. 4.
[3] 1 Sam. xix. 24; Ezek. ii. 2; Dan. viii. 18; x. 15, 16; 2 Cor. xii. 2–4; Rev. i. 10, 17.

and forthwith is startled by hearing the trumpet-like voice which he had heard before — whose voice we are not told—calling on him to "Come up," that the speaker may show him through this gate of sight, the things which must come to pass in the future; the vision he had already seen concerning only the present. Though already "in the Spirit," a higher inspiration was needed, to fit him for the transcendent revelation now to be vouchsafed. But straightway this came upon him, and he felt himself, as it were, borne upwards, and led to the great opening into the highest heavens, thus mysteriously revealed, and placed in full view of the throne of God, and the glorious company before it.

The wondrous picture that follows is a striking instance of the Hebrew colouring of John's mind, through familiarity with rabbinical "wisdom," but, no less, of the loftiness of his conceptions, far transcending those of the rabbis; as shown in his transfiguration of Old Testament prophecy, from whom both largely draw the outlines and embellishments of their creations. Thus in one of the old Jewish books of the highest authority in its sphere,[1] a vision of God is set forth, which tells us that "four companies of ministering angels praise God, the ever blessed. The first is that of Michael, on the right hand; the second, that of Gabriel, on the left; the third, that of Uriel, before God; the fourth, that of Raphael, behind Him. But the Shechina of God, ever blessed, is in the middle, and He sits on an amber throne, high and lifted up, and the seat of it is exalted and hangs in air, and the splendour of its magnificence is as Chasmal," the word used in the vision of Ezekiel, and translated amber in

[1] Pirke R. Elieser, c. 4, quoted by Schoettgen.

our version.[1] "On His head is a crown and diadem, with Schemhamphorasch — the mystical word by which the rabbis veil the incommunicable name 'Jehovah' — on the front of it. His eyes wander about through all the earth, part of them raining fire, and part, hail. On His right is life, on His left, is death, and there is a fiery sceptre in His hand. Before Him is spread out a veil, and seven angels, who were created from the beginning, minister before Him, within it. The footstool of His feet is like fire and lightning, and under the throne of His glory there shine, as it were, sapphire and fire. Round the throne are justice and judgment and seven clouds of glory, and the wheel of His chariot, and the cherubim, and the living creatures, give it glory. The likeness of the throne is that of sapphire, and at its four feet are four living creatures, of which each has four faces and as many wings. When God speaks from the east, He does so between two cherubim with the face of a man; when He speaks from the south, He does so between two cherubim with the face of a lion; when He speaks from the west, He does so between two cherubim with the face of an ox; and when He speaks from the north, He does so between two cherubim with the face of an eagle. And the living creatures stand close to the throne of glory, but yet do not know its glory. And they stand in fear and trembling, in horror and shaking, and from this shaking of their faces a fiery river goes out before them. Of two seraphs, one stands on the right hand of God, ever blessed; the other, on the left hand, and each has six wings; with two of which they cover their face, lest they should see the face of the Shechina,) that is, of God);

[1] Ezek. i. 4.

with two they cover their feet, lest they—(the feet)—should see the Shechinah, and that they may always note the traces of His footsteps; and with two they fly; and they fear and sanctify His great name. And one cries and the other answers, 'Holy, holy, holy,' &c. And the living creatures stand next his glory, yet they do not know the place of his glory, but in every part where His glory is, they cry out and say, 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord in its place.'" Compare this with the grand sublimity of the vision of God in our book, and we see the contrast between inspiration and merely human invention.

The Old Testament visions from which the materials of the vision of John and of these elaborate inventions of the rabbis are, alike, more or less, drawn, are found in various parts of the sacred writings. Thus, Micaiah, the prophet, tells Ahab that he had seen Jehovah sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him, on His right hand and on His left.[1] Isaiah records how, in a vision, he "saw Jehovah sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the skirts of His robes filled the Temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."[2] Ezekiel sees a great fiery cloud[3] with the likeness of four living creatures in it; human in shape, but each with four faces and four wings, and the feet of oxen; human hands appearing on their four sides, and their whole form shining with the splendour of bur-

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 19. [2] Isa. vi. 2–4. [3] Ezek. i.

nished brass. Each form, moreover, was like a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle on its four sides. They were, moreover, like burning coals of fire, that is, of wood, and kindled lamps, while lightnings shot out of the quivering brightness. Such conceptions were unknown in Scripture, before Ezekiel's day, except in the case of the cherubim in Eden and over the ark,[1] the idea of which was doubtless taken from the mystical creations so common in Assyria and Babylon, and indeed, in the kingdom of Accad, in Mesopotamia, long before the rise of either of these states. But the residence of Ezekiel in Babylonia, made him familiar with the huge emblematic human- and animal-headed figures, of great size, guarding the courts and halls of the royal palaces, or watching at their gates, and the huge water-wheels on the Euphrates, and the multitude of war-chariots, would readily suggest the mighty living wheels he describes, of awful height, moving like the light, attended by the four-faced creatures already seen. The noise of their wings, we are told, when they moved, was like that of great waters, or the voice of El Shaddai, or the uproar of a tumult, or the sound of an army. Above their heads, moreover, when they stood, was the likeness of a firmament, and above that, the likeness of a throne, like a sapphire, and on this throne was the form of a man, from within whose body, from the loins upward,—"chasmal" that is, perhaps, amber-coloured fire, seemed to gleam, while fire, sending out brightness round it, formed his lower parts—the brightness, as in the vision of John, looking like the "bow that is in the cloud, in the day of rain." This, says the Prophet, was "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."[2]

[1] Exod. xxxvii. 7; 2 Chron. iii. 10. [2] Ezek. i. 28.

In the visions of the Book of Daniel, the imagery is very different. "The Ancient of Days," we are told, was seen on His throne; "his garment white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool; His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels—(those of the throne)—as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him; thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set and the books were opened."[1] How far John made use of these Scriptural materials to set before us, as far as human words and imagery can do so, the secrets of the heavens and their realisation in the Church and the world will be seen as we go on. Meanwhile, the details of his opening vision demand our study.

Caught up, in his ecstasy, to "the third heavens," to use the expression of St. Paul, the seer finds himself in view of the throne of God, but with the dread of a Jew to speak the awful name, only tells us that "One sat on it." Nor can he speak of Him except in emblems. A splendour shone round Him like that of the diamond[2] and the sardius or cornelian; flashing mingled rays of pure crystal brightness and of ruddy glory, while over the throne there bent, far above, a rainbow, not of the tints known to us, but like the soft green of an emerald—tempering the awful glory around, with the tenderness of infinite, pitying love. Round about the throne, and before God,[3] were twenty-four thrones, on which sat twenty-four elders, the representatives of the collective people of God; their number perhaps taken from that of the twenty-four courses of priests appointed by David.[4] Or, it may be, they stand, in equal numbers, for the churches of the Old and

[1] Dan. vii. 9, 10. [2] Rev. xxi. 11. [3] Rev. xi. 16. [4] 1 Chron. xxiv.

New Dispensations; twelve of each being suggested by the twelve tribes of Israel. But, in any case, they are fellow-men, and represent the whole Church of God, of every age and race. These glorified saints were fitly arrayed in the white robes of purity and triumph which are the raiment of heaven, and wore crowns of gold—the thrones and the crowns showing the kingly dignity often promised to the saints, by our Lord and His apostles.[1] Moses had assured Israel that, if they were faithful to God, they would be made "a kingdom of priests,"[2] and St. Peter calls the true disciples of Christ, the spiritual Israel, "a royal priesthood,"[3] while, in the Apocalypse, John tells us that they are made "a kingdom and priests unto God," "to reign on the earth" "for ever and ever,"[4] and this vision is the proof that these promises would be fulfilled. In the passages already quoted from Daniel, an innumerable multitude of the blessed were seen before the throne of the Ancient of Days,[5] and Isaiah had foretold that God would reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, before His elders or "ancients" gloriously,[6] so that, apart from rabbinical embellishments, Scripture had already given the germ of the conception of co-assessors with God, in His glory.

Meanwhile, lightnings shot forth from the throne, with thundering, and voices: emblems of the kingly omnipotence of Him who sat on it, round whom there is thus, as in the prophets, a veil of thick clouds and darkness, from which, as at Sinai, lightnings shot forth, and rolling thunders—regarded, then, as the divine voice,—and peals

[1] Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 29, 30; 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3; Rev. ii. 26; xx. 4.
[2] Exod. xix. 6.
[3] 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[4] Rev. i. 6; v. 10; xx. 6; xxii. 5.
[5] Dan. vii. 10.
[6] Isa. xxiv. 23.

as of trumpets, like those that filled the Hebrews with terror,[1] or as in the majestic imagery of the Psalms.[2]

But while it was thus "very tempestuous round about him,"[3] a calm reigned beyond, amidst which John saw seven lamps, which are "the seven Spirits of God;" symbols of the attributes of the divine Spirit, illuminating and laying bare the secrets of the bosom, like the "eyes of flame" of our Lord Himself. Outside these mysteries, there stretched a wide expanse, smooth and shining as the sleeping ocean, when the winds are hushed and the waters like a mirror, as John must often have seen them round Patmos. Through the calm brightness of this wondrous scene, the fiery splendours of the throne shine back; the glowing effulgence mingling in the sea-like crystal, as when the evening sun paves the ocean waters with its glory. But now, before the throne, and on each side of it, he discerns, amidst the clouds and lightnings, four living creatures—the representatives of all animate creation, standing before, behind, and on each side of the throne—all four with their faces towards the Almighty. These beings, he can see, are full of eyes behind as well as before; and their faces, respectively, are like a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle. Each has six wings, so that they are evidently counterparts of the cherubim which Ezekiel had seen in his vision. But while Ezekiel's cherubim represent the same creatures as the wondrous forms in John's vision, each has four similar faces, while in John each has only one face, and, whereas in Ezekiel, they had only four wings each, in John they have six, like the seraphs of Isaiah.[4] But, like Ezekiel's wheels, they were "full of

[1] Exod. xix. 16.
[2] Ps. xcvii. 2–4; xviii. 7–13; xxix. 3 ff.
[3] Ps. l. 3.
[4] Ezek. i. 6; Isa. vi. 2.

eyes round about and within"—that is, on their bodies and under their wings, to fit them to bear the throne of God whithersoever He directs;[1] which demands that they should be instinct with life and swiftest motion, and sleepless watchfulness. And now these, as the representatives of all that lives, are heard praising God, the Creator and Sustainer of all living nature, as, indeed, they do unceasingly, day and night, for ever; this adoration of the Eternal Father by all His works, rising in the threefold ascription heard by Isaiah in his vision of the Almighty, —"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come." But they are not alone in their homage to the Ever Blessed, for at the sound of their anthem, the four-and-twenty elders swell the jubilation with their voices; the whole redeemed people of God thus, in emblem, uniting with nature at large in extolling the Parent of all. "And when the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sitteth on the throne, to Him that liveth for ever and ever, the four-and-twenty elders," we are told, "shall fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they came into being and were created."[2]

Another stage in the vision is now reached.[3] John sees in the right hand of the Almighty, as He sat on the throne, a roll—for that was the form of ancient books—written, not, as usual, only on the inside of the parchment, but also, as sometimes was seen, on the outside. It was so divided.

[1] 2 Sam. xxii. 11; Ps. xviii. 10. [2] Rev. iv. 9–11. [3] Rev. v.

moreover, into seven portions rolled together, each reaching beyond the one next it, that each could be sealed by itself. There were thus seven seals on the circumference of the great roll, precluding the knowledge of the writing within, till they were opened; the seal of each part, however, permitting it to be opened and read by itself, beginning with the first. This mysterious "book" was no less than the engrossment of the divine decrees, bearing thus, hidden within it, till it was unsealed, the future story of the world and of the kingdom of God. The seer was now to be "shown the things which must shortly come to pass;" and thus to receive the disclosures to be given to the churches through him; their one object being a "revetion of Jesus Christ" in the divine judgments on the heathen, by which His coming, "shortly" to be expected, or even "at hand," was to be heralded: that coming being His "revelation," or "revealing." Presently, a mighty angel, whose voice sounded not only through all heaven, but down to the earth, and over all its lands, and even through the vast subterranean kingdom of the dead, or Hades—was heard, as an august herald, "proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy," that is, able, "to open the book, and to loose its seals?" But no one was found who could do so, either in heaven, on the earth, or in the pale kingdoms of the dead, underneath. It seemed, thus, as if the secret counsels of God concerning things future were, after all, to remain hidden. Fearing this, the seer was greatly distressed, and wept bitterly to think that the consolation and support which, he felt assured, they would vouchsafe to his suffering brethren, should be withheld. But he was not left in his sorrow, for one of the twenty-four crowned and white-robed elders, throned

"before God," seemed in the vision to say to him: "Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome" all hindrance, by His death and resurrection, and is able "to open the book and the seven seals thereof." As the Saviour of mankind and head of the kingdom of God, He was the fitting and only possible medium of all revelation respecting it. Himself one of the trophies of Christ's victory over sin and death, the elder realised its whole significance. Jacob in his dying blessing had compared Judah to a lion,[1] and the tribal flag had borne this emblem as its glory, for ages, and now Jesus, as the Messiah promised from of old, a Son of Judah in the flesh, had shown Himself, in a transcendent sense, the Lion of His tribe, while He was, also, "the root of David," as the shoot springing with fresh victorious power from his "root" or lineage.[2] Even while on earth, He had, once and again, drawn aside the veil and revealed some of the mysteries of the future,[3] and the opening of the sealed book was, therefore, only one more illustration of His divine foreknowledge.

Christ, who had been so lowly on earth, and had suffered an ignominious and cruel death, is now seen, clothed with all power, and governing all things by His providence. As John looks towards the thrones of the elders, bending outwards, in equal number, on each side of the throne of God, he sees in their midst, that is, before God, and in the immediate presence, also, of the four living ones, a Lamb standing, with a wound in its throat, "as though it had been slain" on the altar, but, strange to say, with seven horns—the emblem, in those ages, of kingly power, and with seven eyes, the emblem of omniscience, or, as

[1] Gen. xlix. 9. [2] Isa. xi. 10. [3] Matt. xxiv.; Luke xxi.

John describes them, of "the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth," under the direction of Christ, to carry out His will. Such a form would be quite in keeping with the strange phantasmagoria we expect in a vision, especially in the case of John, whose mind was familiar with such mystical creations in the old Prophets. But of course it can only be regarded as purely figurative: an emblematic and touching remembrance of Christ being known, by His followers on earth, as "the Lamb of God." This mystic Lamb now came forward and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne; for the New Testament constantly teaches that Christ receives all power from the Father.[1] That the awful roll was delivered to Him, thus proclaimed that Christ was the intermediary appointed by the Godhead, to reveal those final and imminent purposes towards the churches and the persecuting heathen world, which it was the object of the Apocalypse to make known.[2]

That the secret counsels of God were thus to be revealed to His people, was the signal, in the vision, for an outburst of adoration in heaven, to Him who, alone, in these celestial regions or on earth, was able to make them known. No sooner, therefore, had the Lamb taken the book from the hand of the Father, than John, in the dream-picture of his entranced spirit, saw, as it seemed, all heaven moved to loudest jubilation. Forthwith, the four emblematic living creatures, and the twenty-four elders, of course only phantoms of a vision, but none the less the expression of eternal verities, having first cast themselves down before the Lamb, in lowliest worship, began a loud anthem to His praise; the Lamb being felt worthy to share in the divine

[1] Col. i. 19; Phil. ii. 9; Matt. xxviii. 18. [2] Rev. xxi.

honours already paid to Him who sat on the throne.[1] The elders, besides their white robes and golden crowns, had, now, each, a harp in one hand and in the other, golden bowls of incense, which, in its clouds of perfumed smoke, was the symbol in the ancient world, both among Jews and heathen, of prayer; as when the Psalmist asks that his prayer "may be set forth before God as incense; and the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice."[2] The incense offered by the elders, in accordance with this, was, we are told, the symbol of the prayers of the saints; brought thus, it would seem, to "the remembrance of the Holy One," as the prayers of Tobit are said to have been by the angel,[3] or as an angel is represented by John, hereafter, as "standing at the (heavenly) altar, having a golden censer, to whom much incense was given, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints, upon the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."[4] Then, while the clouds of incense rose up before the throne, the seer heard a new song break forth from the twenty-four representatives of the redeemed—new, because it proclaimed the glory of the Lamb, for having obtained the opening of the sealed book of God's purposes, through the salvation won by His blood. "Worthy art Thou," John seemed to hear them cry, "to take the book, and to open its seals: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood, men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they shall reign upon the earth."[5] A "new song" for special favours

[1] Rev. v. 13; xxii. 1. [2] Ps. cxli. 2. [3] Tobit xii. 12.
[4] Rev. viii. 3, 4. [5] Rev. v. 9, 10.

from God, or in honour of some special display of His majesty, was familiar to the Hebrews, as it is to ourselves; for we find the expression often used in the Psalms and elsewhere.[1] Nor was it without a mighty consolation to the suffering Christians to whom the Apocalypse was addressed, that Christianity was promised such a future.

But now, as the new song ends, a fresh wonder appears, for outside the circle of the elders and four living creatures immediately round the throne, John, lifting up his eyes, sees the countless hosts of angels, gathered to celebrate, with these, the glories of the Lamb; their number being grandly expressed as ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. All this multitude, which no man could number, now join in the anthem of the elders and living creatures—the redeemed in all their fulness, and animate nature in all its tribes,—the whole choir of the skies, and the universal Church, and the myriad creatures of earth thus uniting, "with a great voice," in the praise of the Redeemer. "Worthy is the Lamb," they sang, "that has been slain, to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing."[2]

But now, when the angels, the saints, and all the creatures, have magnified the victory of the Lamb, the whole universe thus showing a common sympathy in the salvation of mankind; there rises a final *Magnificat* from all, to God and the Lamb together; Christ being thus put on an equality, in praise and honour, with the Eternal Father; a striking illustration of the acceptance of our Lord's divinity by the earliest generations of

[1] Rev. xiv. 3; as in Isa. xlii. 10; Ps. xl. 4; xcvi. 1; cxliv. 9.
[2] Rev. v. 11, 12.

Christians. For now "every created thing in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and on the seas, and all things that are in them,"[1] seemed, in the vision, to raise an anthem ascribing "unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever." This, sung in loftiest strains, rising up to the throne from all the regions of creation, and from the innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men made perfect, is a conception of unmatched sublimity in any literature. The vision passes to another stage as the four living creatures say, Amen—for all nature; the twenty-four elders, the symbol of "the blessed company of all faithful people," falling down as they did so, and worshipping.[2]

[1] Rev. v. 13.

[2] Rev. v. 14. The words "Him that liveth for ever and ever" are omitted by the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, and the Codex Vaticanus. The Revised Version also omits them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

We know how in a dream or reverie, a succession of events which appear to extend over years are, really, the swift succeeding experiences of the moment between our sleeping and awaking. It needs not surprise us, therefore, that scene after scene follows, without any intimation of a break, in the trance into which John had passed. Nor needs it be thought strange, when we remember the disconnected and abnormal conceptions, which seem, in our dreams, perfectly regular and fitting, to find the unexpected and peculiar imagery, which a mind filled with that of prophets and rabbis, introduces in the visions of the Apocalypse. It is, for example, not only in keeping with the office and work of Christ, that as a Jew, John should see Him taking the form of a Lamb, but it is no less natural that, in the brain-pictures of a vision, he should see the Lamb taking the Book out of the hand of the Eternal; anything whatever seeming as it should be, when the imagination controls all the faculties, and creates through them such phantasmagoria as people our dreams. The difference between ordinary "visions of the night" and those of the Apocalypse or other books of Scripture, is that, however extraordinary the symbolism of these may be, it is always an exact presentment of great truths, expressed in the form and language of vision, from the

Oriental fondness for such a style, but, in reality, only describing, as if seen, in figure and symbol, the secrets of the future revealed by God to the seer.

This mystical way of writing, which had been in vogue among the Jews from the days of Ezekiel, and was still in favour during the apostolic age, among Jewish religious writers as a class—apocalyptic books being very numerous in those times,—is strikingly illustrated in the description by John of what followed the receiving of the book by the Lamb. Looking towards this central figure, he saw Him open one of the seals, and forthwith one of the four living creatures called on John with a voice like the "noise of thunder," to come and see. Summoned thus, he kept his eyes on what followed. With the strange incongruity of visions, four horsemen seemed to come out of the roll, as one seal after another was opened; the counterparts, one may think, of the horses of the vision of Zechariah,[1] but now the emblems of a conquering and destroying host, which are to bring on the earth the woes predicted by Christ Himself, as preceding His return.[2] At the opening of the first seal there appeared a white horse, on which sat one armed with a bow, and presently honoured by a crown, to whom it was given to go forth conquering and to conquer. To attempt to identify either this or the riders that followed, seems hopeless, for if with some, we think of the white horse —the symbol of victory,—the Romans using white horses in their triumphs,[3]—as having for its rider no other than the victorious Christ, it is hard to find an explanation of His having a bow, which is more like an allusion to the weapon of the fierce warlike Parthians, beyond the Euphrates; in those very times, a constant dread to Western Asia, their

[1] Zech. vi. [2] Matt. xxiv. [3] Virg. *Æn.* iii. 537.

invasion of which, with their countless cavalry in the later days of the Asmonean kings, was still remembered with indescribable terror. Yet it appears difficult to ascribe the riding forth conquering and to conquer, to any one but the triumphant Redeemer. A red horse appeared next, when the second seal was opened—the symbol of war, in keeping with which John learned that power had been given to him who sat on it, to take peace from the earth, and set men everywhere against each other; a great sword being appropriately given to the rider. The awful strife predicted by Christ as heralding His return—"nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," as in the last days of Nero's reign, and in the interregnum that preceded that of Vespasian, and as in Judæa before the final destruction of the Jewish state, vividly rises at the thought of the great sword, and the horse of the colour of blood. Nor were the famines predicted by Christ[1] less strikingly indicated by the black horse which appeared at the opening of the third seal—black being the symbol of all modes of evil. In keeping with the rule in times of pressing scarcity, to weigh out to each person, by a magistrate, or the head of a "gens,"—the clients of a patrician,—the dole on which the common people of Rome lived, —the rider bore in his hand a pair of balances, to weigh out wheat and barley to the hungry multitude. But the denarius, or "penny," the ordinary day's wage of a labourer,[2] which, in good times, would buy eight quarts of wheat, would now buy only one—the daily allowance for a single person—while the cheaper, disliked barley, given even to soldiers as a punishment—was sold at only three quarts for the same money. What could they do, who,

[1] Matt. xxiv. [2] Matt. xx. 2.

with a family to support, earned only a penny a day? But the fell rider was required to spare the wine and the oil; each of vital importance even to the poorest in Southern and Eastern lands; a tempering of judgment, that man should not utterly perish.

The opening of the fourth seal [1] is a wonderful example of how

> "Imagination bodies forth
> The form of things unknown; the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."

When the Lamb opens this portion of the roll, the thunder-like voice of the fourth living creature calls on John, once more, to "Come:" each of the four mystic beings near the throne having, in succession, thus summoned his attention, as one seal after another was broken. Forthwith, in the vision, a human form seems to ride forth, seated on a horse of a corpse-like paleness, well befitting the awful form that bestrode it; his look instantly proclaiming that he was no other than Death, itself. Behind this Terror followed Hades, the personified world of the dead, to gather into his dark realms the harvest of mortality falling before the shadowy chief, to whom he owes all their innumerable population. The prophet learns, as he gazes, that this dread phantom has had authority given him over the fourth part of the earth, that is, of its people, to destroy them with sword, and with famine, and with pestilence: the desolation by such slaughter leaving the wild beasts to multiply so greatly, that they also become the instruments of a wide destruc-

[1] Rev. vi. 7.

tion. Nothing is said of Christians escaping this visitation, for they were to suffer, among others; their enemies hunting them down as the authors of calamities so overwhelming. "Wars, rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and such tribulation as had not been from the beginning of the world, or ever should be,"[1] had been foretold by Jesus Himself as preceding His advent, and John now only repeats His ominous words, which were even then being so terribly fulfilled, and were almost immediately to be still more so, in the horrors of the fall of the Jewish state. Josephus tells us how war, famine, and pestilence desolated Palestine in these years.[2] Bad harvests had prevailed for almost a generation, in one part or other. Between the years 44 and 48 famine had stricken Judæa sorely.[3] Under Claudius, similar scarcity had visited other parts of the empire;[4] and an awful famine, succeeded by a great mortality, from the pestilence induced by hunger and misery, had filled the whole empire with mourning, in the year 65, during Nero's reign.[5] The churches knew that they would be "hated of all the nations" for bearing the name of Christians, and that unless these evil days had been mercifully shortened by divine decree, "no flesh would be saved,"[6] and must have read this renewal of these awful intimations with trembling terror. But the tenor of the Apocalypse would sustain them, by its confident assurance that Christ would presently descend from heaven, and calm this tempestuous state of things, bringing them as He of

[1] Matt. xxiv. 7, 21. [2] Jos. *Ant.* v. 9.
[3] Acts x. 28; Jos. *Ant* xx. 2, 5; Euseb. "Church Hist." ii. 11, 33.
[4] Suet. *Claudius*, 18; Tac. *Annal.* 12, 43.
[5] Tac. *Annal.* 16, 13; Suet. *Nero*, 39, 45.
[6] Matt. xxiv. 9, 22; Mark xiii. 9–13; Luke xxi. 11.

old had brought His apostles, on the Sea of Galilee, to their desired rest, amidst a great calm.

The opening of the fifth seal was marked by a new wonder. The appearance as of a great golden altar of burnt-offering, like that which stood before the Holy Place in the Temple of Jerusalem, rose before the seer, in front of the throne of God. The priests at Jerusalem poured out, at the foot of the altar, the blood of the victims, which, thus, ran below it, down conduits, to the valley of Hinnom. As the counterpart of this, John now sees, under this shadowy heavenly altar, the spirits of the martyrs "who had been slain for the word of God, and for the witness they held" to the name of Jesus, as if they had given up their lives upon it as a sacrifice to the truth,—for martyrdom was always regarded as a sacrifice to God.[1] Jewish theology, moreover, had long conceived the souls of the righteous as waiting in their "chambers," asking, "How long are we here? When cometh the fruit of the threshing time of our reward?"[2]—their chambers, however, being those of the grave.[3] The Talmud, moreover, represents these souls as kept safe, under the throne of the divine glory,[4] from beneath which they ask when the time of their reward will come, as, in Luke's Gospel, Christ Himself asks, "Shall not God avenge His elect, who cry to Him day and night?"[5] Hereafter, John was to see the prayers of all saints offered, with incense, on the heavenly altar, as a sweet-smelling savour to God.[6] Any nearness, after death, to the earthly altar, had long been regarded by the Jews as a special honour and blessing; their feeling being, that any one buried in the land of

[1] Phil. ii. 17; 2 Tim. iv. 6. [2] 4 Esdras iv. 35. [3] 4 Esdras iv. 41.
[4] Sabbat. 152. [5] Luke xviii. 7. [6] Rev. viii. 3.

Israel was almost as if buried under the altar, and that he who is buried under the altar, is almost as if buried under the throne of God.[1] The blood of Abel had cried to God from the ground,[2] and the same idea is implied in our Lord's words respecting the elect crying to God to "avenge them" on their adversaries. John thus simply repeats the ideas then held by every Jew, as in accordance with the mind of God, when he tells us that the souls of the martyrs cry with a great voice, "How long, O Master (whose we are, the holy and true), dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"[3] That there should have been any even then, as this implies, who had died as Christians, speaks of sufferings not otherwise recorded. The great tribulation of the year 64, at Rome, after the burning of the city, had evidently been followed by outbursts of hatred and violence against the Christians in all parts, though we do not know the details of their sufferings, except in the imperial city. In Asia Minor, where the worship of the reigning emperor had virtually superseded that of all other divinities, it would be enough that the Cæsar had raged against Christians on the Tiber, to make the authorities equally bloodthirsty in the region of the seven churches, where John, himself, tells us, he had been "their companion in tribulation."

But the cry of the souls of the martyrs, from beneath the altar, was not lost, for a white robe was forthwith given to each of them, as an assurance of their speedily seeing their enemies fall, and the kingdom of Christ set up on earth. It was, however, said to them, we know not by what speaker, that they would have to rest patient for

[1] P. Aboth. xxvi. [2] Gen. iv. 10. [3] Rev. vi. 10.

a little time, till the number of those servants of God, and brethren in Christ, yet to die for their faith, was completed. Then would come their final triumph, in the descent of Christ, to consume the adversary, and to be glorified in His jubilant and exalted saints.

The five seals had revealed a succession of judgments leading on to the Coming of Christ; the hope of the faithful. With the opening of the sixth, the last stage before "the day of the Lord," to which the Christians so eagerly looked forward, has actually arrived. The wonders accompanying this scene in the vision are a close repetition of the predictions of our Lord in the Gospels;[1] showing that the contents of these were universally known among the churches, even before they were committed to writing. Indeed, the advantage of their being written down would scarcely be felt, as Christ was expected to return while the generation that had seen Him were still alive, and while the apostles and first disciples were continually repeating, in all parts to which they travelled, the whole story of the life and sayings of their Master. Many local Gospels, however, would undoubtedly be taken down by zealous souls, furnishing, more or less, the materials of those we now have, and from these as well as from oral information, John was able to reproduce, as he does, what Jesus had taught of the signs preceding His coming back to earth.

The phenomena of nature, in ages before science, as they still are in many countries not yet advanced beyond the condition of intellectual childhood, were universally regarded as due to the direct action of invisible ghostly or divine powers, who indicated by them their nearer or

[1] Luke xxi. 25, 26; Matt. xxiv. 29.

more remote purposes, towards the individual, the community, or the state. Among the Hebrews, this theology of omens and portents had been reduced to a science, long before Christ; even their forefathers having been familiar with it millenniums earlier; for the priests of Mesopotamia, from which they came, have left us, in the clay tablets of their sacred libraries, many treatises on the significance of whatever happens in nature. We need not then wonder to find in the Talmud [1] the same imagery as John now introduces,[2] with the meaning of the various omens thus recounted. "If the face of the sun," we are told, "is like blood, the sword is coming on the world; if it be like sackcloth, the arrows of famine are coming; if like both, then both war and famine are coming." In keeping with this, Josephus, learned as he was, attached the deepest significance to "signs" in the heavens; drawing the darkest conclusions from the fact, as alleged, of "a star," like a sword, which stood over Jerusalem just before the war, and from a comet which was visible for a whole year.[3] Our Lord Himself, indeed, tells the disciples that before His coming there will be earthquakes,[4] and signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the vision of John, now brings the realisation of these prophetic wonders before him. He sees [5] the earth shaken by a great earthquake; the sun become black as sackcloth,—the sign of mourning among the Jews; the whole moon become as blood, the sign of impending wars; and the stars falling to the earth, that is, a shower of "falling stars," numerous as the fall of unripe figs from their parent tree, when it is shaken by a great wind.[6]

[1] *Sacca*, f. 29, 1. [2] Rev. vi. 12, 13. [3] Jos. *Bell. Jud.* vi. 5, 3.
[4] Luke xxi. 11, 25. [5] Rev. vi. 12–17. [6] Rev. vi. 12, 13.

But even this is not sufficient to indicate the awful grandeur of the event at hand. The very heaven itself,—the firmament in which the now vanished stars had been fixed,—disappears, as the writing of a "book" is hidden when it is rolled up, and along with this obliteration of the skies, every mountain and island of the earth is moved out of its place, by appalling physical convulsions. There is, in fact, a final and total overthrow of existing nature; the last judgment has come, and is about to open! And now the long-suffering Christians are indeed "avenged" on their persecutors, for "the kings of the earth," in common with the meanest of their subjects, are overwhelmed with fear, and, with the princes, the high officers of nations, and the silken population of courts, and the commanders of armies, and the rich men of the earth, and the mighty men of valour, and the hitherto proud freeman, and even every poor slave, in wild despair, bury themselves in the caves and rocks, and cry to the mountains and quivering hills to fall on them and hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath had come, and who was able to stand! If they could only die, and thus escape that wrath, how blessed![1]

[1] The degree to which the Jewish mind in the apostolic age was saturated by the phraseology of the Old Testament is strikingly shown in this part of John's vision, as may be seen by reference, among other texts, to Joel iii. 14, 15; ii. 2, 30, 31; Isa. lxiii. 4; Nah. i. 5, 6; Mal. iii. 2; Isa. xxxiv. 4; Jer. iv. 24, 28; Isa. ii. 19; Hosea x. 8; Isa. xiii. 6, 10; Zeph. i. 14, 15; Ps. lxxvi. 7, 8.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

THE inexhaustible possibilities of imagination in visions, like those in ordinary dreams, had shown John the company of the redeemed standing on the wide expanse of a glass-like sea, kindled, as it were, into fire, by the splendours of the throne of God—a sea which, it would seem, was only a broadening out of the river of the water of life which he afterwards saw, flowing forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb.[1] A new scene now rises before him. The further development of the last judgment is delayed for a time, till the interests of the followers of Christ have been safeguarded. John had hitherto only put into visible pictures the predictions of our Lord Himself, using almost His actual language,[2] but he now sees the further words of Christ, respecting His own disciples, in this awful time, translated into a grand spectacle, as if carried out before his eyes. Yet we must not forget that the whole is only the creation of his wondrous imagination, embodying in outward form, as if a reality to outward sense, what Christ had left to the imagination of those who heard Him. He was to send forth His angels, He had said, with a great sound of a trumpet, and they would gather together His elect from

[1] Rev. xxii. 1.

[2] Matt. xxiv. 29, 30; Mark xiii. 24, 25; Luke xxi. 25, 26.

the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,[1] and this John sees done; the angels having already gathered the redeemed before the throne, when his sublime vision opens.

The Hebrews, like other nations of antiquity, fancied that the winds were stored up in caves, under the charge of special guardians, who let them free according to the will of the supreme powers. Ulysses, for example, in the *Odyssey*, was favoured by Eolus giving him the winds needed to waft him safely to rocky Ithaca:

> "From a nine-year ox
> He flayed the skin, and gave a bag wherein
> The courses of the blust'ring winds he bound;
> For Jove had made him steward of the winds,
> Or to appease or rouse, whiche'er he willed.
> He bound it down within the hollow ship
> With silver cord, that not a breath could 'scape."[2]

Much on a par with this is the science of the book of Enoch, which embodies the ideas of the apostolic age respecting atmospheric phenomena. It tells us of the "store-houses" of the winds, and that "the four winds" bear up the earth, and the firmament of heaven, and that they come out through "doors" in the sky; as indeed, do the sun, moon, and stars; angels presiding over all.[3] In harmony with the belief of his times, therefore, John sees, as it were, four angels, standing at the four corners, or cardinal points, of the earth. The only winds noted by the Hebrews, were under the control of these heavenly beings,[4] who, according to the ideas of the time, must have

[1] Matt. xxiv. 31; Mark xiii. 28.

[2] *Odyssey*, Barnard's Translation, x. 18–24.

[3] See a full illustration of this most interesting book, in volume first of my "Hours with the Bible," Old Testament Series, 55–59.

[4] Jer. xlix. 36; Dan. vii. 2.

held them back by keeping the doors of the firmament closed, through which they ordinarily issued.

Another angel now appeared, ascending from the east, the fitting direction from which one should come, who was to announce so great a favour as he brought from above. As he approached, it was seen that he had been entrusted with the seal of the living God, the characters inscribed on which are not told us, though they may have been the divine name. Lifting up his great voice, which rolled over sea and land, to the four corners of the earth, so that the four angels stationed there heard his words, he commanded them to hurt neither the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, by any hurricane, till "we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." They were thus to be marked as being God's servants, which would vouchsafe them at once His protecting care in the plagues about to be sent on the earth, and also their being kept amidst these, from falling away from their faith and hope. As the living God, He whose they are will preserve them from failing in "the hour of trial, which was to come on the whole world, to try them that dwell on the earth."[1] Their "life," as saints, is to be secured by His seal, since it is that of the living and life-giving God, and its stamp was to be put on their foreheads, as the honoured sign of their being His worshippers. In antiquity, slaves and soldiers were marked, to show whose servants they were, and that they were under his protection, and even to-day, one still sees, among the Hindoos, nearly a hundred different marks on the forehead of the worshippers of different gods; each divinity having his own mark, which his worshipper renews day by day, as his greatest pride.

[1] Rev. iii. 10.

Eastern nations, indeed, in all ages, have honoured this custom, and thus John would have it readily suggested to him, and naturally associate it with the redeemed in his vision. We shall afterwards, indeed, find it used of the worshippers of "the beast" also, who were sealed with his mark on the hand or the forehead.[1]

It was of course impossible, even in the baseless fabric of a vision, to bring before the eye the whole innumerable multitude of the redeemed. But, as was fitting, both branches of the Church were duly represented; the "remnant" of Israel who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and the converts from all the nations of the Gentile world. A large number of Jews had become Christians, but so small a nation could, at best, yield only a limited spiritual harvest, compared with that of all the other races of men, hitherto serving idols. Now, therefore, on the wide landscape, reaching away from the throne of God to the far-off heavenly horizon, the vision showed a mighty array of 144,000 Hebrew Christians, in equal numbers from each of the long-lost tribal divisions of Israel. Not that such a tribute to the Cross was then possible from each of those tribes distinctively, for even in the time of R. Akiba, who flourished about a hundred years after the Crucifixion, the ten tribes had not only never returned, as such, from their Assyrian exile, but it was believed they never would;[2] and even in the time of Nehemiah, nearly 500 years before Christ's death, only the members of the tribes of Benjamin, Judah, and Levi, could be mentioned separately;[3] all other Jews being named together, as "the remnant of Israel." Some

[1] Rev. xiii. 16; xiv. 9; xix. 20; xx. 4.
[2] Schürer, ii. 496.
[3] Neh. xi. 4, 15, 20; i. 8.

members of one or other of the ten tribes, whose ancestors, we may suppose, had escaped deportation, still, no doubt, knew their pedigree, as we find in the case of Anna of Jerusalem, who is said to have been of the tribe of Asher; but they were so few, and from so few of the tribes, that even the rabbis admitted the impossibility of rightfully claiming membership of any particular tribe.[1] The enumeration of the whole twelve tribes in this vision, as still constituting tribes in the apostolic age, must be regarded, therefore, like the same form when used by St. James in his Epistle, as the fond retention of an endearing fancy, long after it had ceased to have any historical reality. Hence, though Israel is not known as "the twelve tribes" in the Apocrypha, the phrase occurs in the second century before Christ, in Esdras,[2] and our Lord, doubtless in honour of this tender memory, chose twelve apostles, while St. Paul gratifies the popular feeling by speaking, in his defence before King Agrippa, of "our twelve tribes" earnestly hoping to realise the promise of the Messiah, made to their fathers.[3] In John's list, however, we find the tribe of Dan omitted, as it had for ages ceased to exist separately, even in the estimate of the Jew. The aversion of a man of Judah to the name of Ephraim, is, moreover, curiously shown, by his substituting for it the acceptable, and even more famous name of "the tribe of Joseph."

But while the vision discloses the great number of Jewish converts even then won to Christ, in spite of the opposition of the nation as a whole, the immensely greater number of heathen-born among the Christians of the day was seen, after the sealing of the 144,000, by the appear-

[1] Luke ii. 36. [2] Esdras vii. 8. [3] Acts xxvi. 7.

ance of "a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb," who still remained where He had stood while opening the sealed book. As tokens of their glorious felicity, this innumerable host were robed in white, and bore palm branches in their hands; symbols, not only of their eternal joy, but of their having come out victorious from the temptations and trials of earth; of their having triumphed over death, the last enemy; and of their being, thenceforth, for ever, before God, as His own redeemed. One thinks of the victors in the great games of those ages, as described by Pausanias.[1] "All the great multitude had on crowns of palm, but in the right hand of the victor, there was also put a palm branch." So it was with the Saviour, on His entry to Jerusalem, when the multitude, to testify their joy, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him,[2] and so was it with the Jews in the old Maccabæan time, under Simon, when, having taken the tower at Jerusalem, they "entered it with thanksgiving, and branches of palm trees," then abundant on these hills, but now all but vanished, "and with harps, and cymbals and viols."[3] With like outburst of victorious and grateful joy, the mighty host of the redeemed now seemed to John, in his vision, to break forth by one consent, from all their myriads of myriads, in a chant of praise and thanksgiving, crying "with a great voice, Salvation unto our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb;" glorifying the Eternal Father as the divine First Source of their felicity, and the Lamb as the Mediator through whom His high counsels of mercy had been so carried out, that they beheld

[1] Pausan. *Arcad.* 48. [2] John xii. 13. [3] 1 Macc. xiii. 51.

the face of God in everlasting peace and joy.[1] It is to be noted that there is no slightest hint of the redeemed from among the Gentiles having had to submit to any Jewish requirements, the demand for compliance with which had so rent and perplexed the churches planted by Paul and his helpers. Nor is there any mention of Moses and the Law, but only of God and the Lamb, so that John had fully recognised the need of a wide Christian liberality, like that of Paul, in a religion designed to be universal.

But now the "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" of angels[2] who encompassed the throne and its inner circle of elders, and of the four living creatures,—filled with a tender sympathy for man, and with a lofty adoration of the Author and Mediator of that salvation which had added to the population of these happy regions, the untold millions of redeemed, whose chant to God and the Lamb had just ended,—feeling constrained, with one accord, to show their love for their younger brethren of earth, bearing the seal of God impressed even now on their foreheads, and the fulness of their welcome to them, fell before the throne on their faces, in lowliest homage, and worshipped their common God, saying, "Amen; Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.[3]

Such a succession of revelations for the moment overpowered the faculties of the seer, and he stood silent. But presently—

13. One of the elders, who as a representative of the whole multitude of the redeemed, might well do so, turned to

[1] Rev. vii. 10. [2] Rev. v. 11. [3] Rev. vii. 12.

him, asking if he knew who they were whom he saw in white robes, just sealed, in whom the angels had shown so touching an interest? 14. John, however, cannot say, and leaves the answer to the elder, in the reply, "My lord, thou knowest." "These," says the crowned form, are they who come safely, without falling, out of the great tribulation, which is to visit the earth and try the faith of the saints, and this they have been enabled to do, because, while they lived, they washed their robes, and made them pure and white in the atoning and redeeming blood of the Lamb. 15. Through this they are now, in your vision, before the throne of God, as they will be in reality, when they have ended their trial on earth, and they will then serve Him as, even on earth, His priestly and kingly people,[1] day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne will fulfil, in glorious completeness, the promise He has often given to His true servants, through the prophets, to dwell among them,[2] for He will spread His tabernacle over them—being with them as one is with those whom he brings into his tent; the cloudy pillar of old no longer sufficing. Nor will the immediate presence of God be their only felicity, for, when they enter heaven, all sorrow and sighing will pass away for ever. Often hungry and thirsty on earth, in their persecution or poverty, 16. they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike down on them, as when they toiled or wandered in its burning heat, nor shall they have to bear any heat of glowing winds; for the Lamb, their Redeemer, and "Good Shepherd" on earth, will be the same in heaven. It will be with them, as Isaiah says of Israel of old,[3] "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them, 17. for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, shall be their shepherd, and shall guide

[1] Rev. i. 6; v. 10. [2] Lev. xxvi. 11; Isa. iv. 5; Ezek. xxxvii. 27. [3] Isa. xlix. 10.

them unto fountains of waters of life, the "still waters," in "green pastures,"[1] and, as Isaiah says of old, that "the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces,"[2] in the Judah of His day, so, God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.[3]

The judgments which were to have been let loose on the earth in wild tempests of the elements, had been held back till the sealing of the redeemed had been finished; the angels to whom had been committed the sending forth the winds on their fell mission, having been made to keep them, for a time, under control. Indeed, with the inconsequential development of a vision, the agency seems to change, for do we not hear of the four winds again, in the same connection? But the strained expectation and mental tension, from the apparent hopelessness of the sealed book being opened, and, then, from anxiety to know its contents, had brought even the heavenly people to a pause; the very elders, the four living creatures, and the hosts of angels, as it were, holding their breath, in voiceless silence; and the thunderings and voices from the cloudy veil of the throne, seeming to have been stilled down, as if in sympathy. Overwhelmed by the thought of the terrors now certainly to be announced at the opening of the last seal; knowing that it must reveal the final catastrophe of the Judgment, the disclosure of which had only been held back till the followers of Christ had been sealed; an interval of, it seemed, about half-an-hour, passed in hushed soundless calm. After this, there was renewed progress in the awful drama.[4] The redeemed had, indeed, been shown that they had no reason to fear—white robed on earth, they would be white

[1] Ps. xxiii. 2. [2] Isa. xxv. 8. [3] Rev. vii. 9–17. [4] Rev. viii. 1 ff.

robed above—the one because of the other—they would be kept faithful to the end, whatever befell mankind at large, and whatever temptations there might be to lead them astray. But humanity is weak, and fear, in spite of all this, filled their souls, as they saw the seven angels who stand before the throne of God, receive from His hands seven trumpets, to proclaim the judgments the seventh seal would let loose.

Isaiah had predicted a time when the Lord of Hosts would reign in Jerusalem, "before His elders gloriously;"[1] and the prophet Micaiah, in Ahab's reign, had painted a visionary scene in heaven, in which God consulted with His host, as they stood on His right hand and on His left, "and one spoke on this manner, and another said on that manner," as if in council with Him.[2] In Job, we read of "a day when the sons of the Elohim—that is, the angels—came to present themselves before Jevovah; Satan, as an angel of light, coming among them, and God is represented as speaking with him, at quite a length, as to his designs.[3] In the Psalms, we read of God sitting in the assembly or council of His holy ones;[4] and Jeremiah speaks, also, of this heavenly council,[5] for the word in both passages means a senate or consultative body,[6] while, in Daniel, we are told[7] that a tribunal of judges sat before the Ancient of Days, and when the books were opened, "they took away his dominion" from a king condemned by them.[8] In Ezekiel, seven angels are sent by God to carry out His judgments on Jerusalem—a mark, or rather, cross, having been previously set by them, in

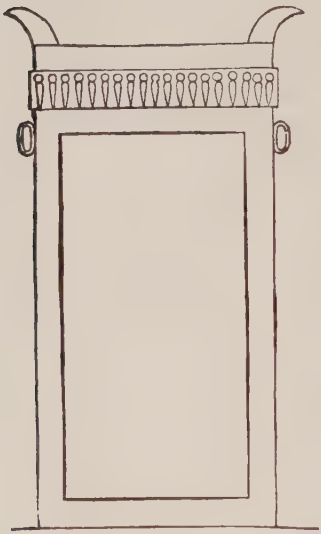
[1] Isa. xxiv. 23. [2] 1 Kings xxii. 19, 20. [3] Job i. 6 ff.
[4] Ps. lxxxix. 7. [5] Jer. xxiii. 18. [6] סוֹד Sôd. [7] Dan. vii. 10, 26.
[8] The Chaldee word is רְעֵוָא, the Hebrew, רָצוֹן.

curious anticipation of the sealing in Revelation, on the foreheads of all those faithful to God, who, like the Christians in the Apocalypse, similarly marked, were not to be harmed.[1] And, finally, Eliphaz asks,[2] "Hast thou listened, in the council of Eloach?" The idea of a heavenly council was thus familiar to the Hebrews for many centuries before Christ, but their residence in Babylon, under the Chaldæans and Persians, seems to have modified their ideas about the economy of the upper heavens, through their finding that the Great King associated with him, of course at a vast distance below his solitary grandeur, seven princes, who acted as his intermediaries in carrying out his decrees,[3] and were known as those "who saw the king's face, and sat the first in the kingdom."[4] It was an easy transition, with such a suggestion, in the awful majesty of an Oriental Sultan, to conceive of the Eternal as similarly setting before Himself, as His immediate ministers, seven angels specially chosen from the hierarchy of the heavens, for this highest honour, and we even find Tobit speak of "the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints," just as in the Apocalypse;[5] it being natural that, as petitions to an earthly monarch were always presented through some high minister of the throne, prayers should be presented in the same way, by these angels of the presence, to God.

The seven trumpets which were to proclaim the closing woes to be poured out on the earth, before the final Judgment, having been handed to these celestial princes, they are seen standing with them before the throne, wait-

[1] Ezek. ix. [2] Job xv. 8. [3] Ezra vii. 1, 14. [4] Esther i. 14.
[5] Rev. viii. 3; Tobit xii. 15.

ing the signal from the Almighty, to sound their awful alarm. Meanwhile, another angel seems to come forward and take his place at the golden altar that was before the throne, as that of burnt-offering was before the Holy Place in the Temple at Jerusalem. In his hand, John noticed, he had a golden censer, which, it appeared, was filled with the prayers of the saints, and "much incense" having been given to him, perhaps by an attendant angel, as in the Temple, it was handed to the ministering priest by a second, behind him; he poured it out on the prayers, and then, having taken fire from the altar to kindle it, waved the burning odours to and fro, so that the smoke of the incense went up "with the prayers, before God, out of the angel's hand," being, as it were, "added to them." This over, a terrible scene follows. Taking the now empty censer, the angel fills it with the burning wood from the altar, and hurls the brands down to the earth, where they forthwith cause an uproar of thunders, and voices, and make the world heave with earthquakes, and scorch it with lightnings.[1] The prayers of the saints, that God would avenge them on their persecutors, had been terribly answered;[2] though all that



The Altar of Incense in the Temple at Jerusalem.

[1] Rev. viii. 3, 4, 5.

[2] Rev. vi. 10.

had befallen them was only the first droppings of the judgments about to be poured out on the ungodly. This, indeed, the seven angels knew, for they forthwith lift their trumpets to their lips and await the command to blow the peal of doom.[1] And now came plagues like those of Egypt, but infinitely more grievous.[2] The blast of the first trumpet seems, in the vision, to be followed by a deluge of hail, falling on the earth, mingled with fire — that is, lightning—and an awful rain of blood. A third of the whole surface of the earth is thus burnt up, while a third of the trees and herbage was consumed over the whole of it, and the grass everywhere scorched out of the ground.

The second trumpet is now heard, and instantly, it seemed as if a great volcano in violent eruption, like some, perhaps, which John may have seen in Sicily, or in the Lipari Islands, for Vesuvius was as yet quiescent, was heaved up from its deep foundations and cast into the sea, a third part of which seemed forthwith to be turned into blood; a third of all its manifold life perishing, and what seemed a third of all the innumerable vessels which had whitened it with their sails, going down in the wild convulsion.

The third angel then blew a blast, and, therewith, a great star, flaming like a torch, launched against the third part of the rivers of the earth and its fountains of waters, fell from heaven, poisoning them till they became like wormwood for bitterness; the star itself bearing that name; and many men dying from having to drink them.

The fourth trumpet was no less disastrous in its results. As its echoes spread, John seemed to see a third of the

[1] Rev. viii. 6–10. [2] Exod. ix. 24 ff.

round of the sun, moon, and stars so darkened that the light of day and night was a third less than before.

The cup of God's wrath was thus continually pouring out judgment after judgment on mankind; if, by any means, they might be brought to repent and seek the forgiveness of God and the Lamb. The spectacle around the seer, in the scenery of his vision, was appalling. The trees, and all the verdure of the earth, had been largely destroyed; the sea strewn with wrecks, and ghastly with corruption, heaving on all its waves; the springs and rivers turned into waters of death; and, now, in keeping with the imagery of the Old Testament prophets, the very luminaries of heaven shrouded in gloom.[1] The signs foretold by our Lord Himself, as immediately preceding His advent, had appeared.[2] It must be at hand![3] The churches would soon be "avenged!" But these calamities would not affect the unbelieving only; the Christians, scattered as they were over all parts, would have to bear their weight. Yet the mark of their God on their foreheads, though it would not keep them from many sorrows, would secure their endurance to the end, amidst all temptations to fall away. It was a pledge of the exceeding and eternal fulness of glory awaiting them beyond the grave.

There was now a pause in the sounding of the trumpets, during which an eagle—the symbol of war and slaughter—appeared, flying in mid-heaven, where all could see his flight and hear his cries. Nothing is impossible in visions, for they are only dreams of a special type, and in accordance with this it seems endowed with a loud

[1] Isa. xiii. 9, 10; lix. 9, 10; Amos viii. 9; Joel ii. 30, 31. Matt. xxiv. 29; Mark xiii. 24; Luke xxi. 11, 25. [3] Rev. i. 3.

human voice, and proclaims, "Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound;"[1] a warning that their results would be still more grievous than even those of the four that had preceded.

[1] Rev. viii. 13.

CHAPTER XI

JUDGMENT ON JUDGMENT

In the Authorised Version, by a corruption of the text, an angel instead of an eagle is seen by the prophet flying in mid-heaven, but strange as the introduction of this symbol from lower forms may be, it is in keeping with the narrative being only a vision: not a sight of realities. This must also be kept in mind through all the details that follow. To attempt to explain the exact significance of the wondrous imaginations, like nothing in nature, is but wasting time and ingenuity, except when some light is thrown on them by the events of John's day, showing how they may have been suggested to him. The countless explanations put forth, age after age, of the symbols and allegories employed: so strange and often monstrous to all but Orientals; prove, by their mutual contradictions, and constantly demonstrated worthlessness, that we must be content to regard these mystical creations as only attempts to embody in human words, and to materialise in visible shapes, the developments of God's purposes dimly foreseen in the mind of the prophet, and oppressing it with thoughts, appalling or exalting, beyond the power of imagination adequately to set forth in ordinary language. The Apocalyptic style of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, the "Revelation," and other similar writings, cannot, in fact, be treated as having, throughout, specific allegorical mean-

ings, needing only the proper cipher to explain them, but must largely be viewed as rather intended to convey general impressions, whether of transcendent majesty, or felicity, or tribulation. It would, indeed, be as unreasonable to look upon Milton's sublime personification of Sin and Death; mother and son; as describing actualities.

> "Before the gates [of hell] there sat
> On either side a formidable shape;
> The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,
> But ended foul in many a scaly fold
> Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed
> With mortal sting: about her middle round
> A cry of hell-hounds never ceasing barked
> With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung
> A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,
> If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,
> And kennel there, yet there still barked and howled,
> Within unseen.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The other shape,
> If shape it might be called that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
> Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
> For each seemed either; black it stood as night,
> Fierce as ten furies, terrible as Hell,
> And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head
> The likeness of a kingly crown had on."
>
> —*Paradise Lost*, book ii. 648–673.

We feel that these awful creations are only "imagination bodying forth the forms of things unknown; the poet's pen turning them to shapes, and giving to airy nothing, a local habitation and a name."[1] We shall be safe, in studying the Apocalypse, only if we keep this steadily in mind.

[1] *Midsummer's Night's Dream*, Act, v. sc. i.

At the sounding of the fifth trumpet, the prophet sees, in his vision, a star which had fallen from heaven to earth, but this emblem presently appears to be regarded as an angel, for "there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss;"[1] the passage very much resembling one in the Book of Enoch quoted by St. Jude, in which a star falls from heaven, and turning into a living creature, "browses among the oxen"[2] The "abyss" is imagined as a fathomless depth, with an opening like that of a well, or spring, leading to it from the upper world. It is, in fact, that under world to which, St. Paul tells us, Christ descended after death,[3] while St. Luke, on the other hand, describes it as the region to which the devils, when cast out, betake themselves; the same word being used in both texts.[4] But it is treated uniformly in the Apocalypse as the prison-house of the devil and his angels, and, in keeping with this, is translated in the Authorised Version, each of the seven times it is mentioned, as "the bottomless pit."[5] It is closed by impassable gates, secured by a key, which our Lord now holds, in token of His victorious death and resurrection,[6] though the word Hades is used instead of "abyss" in the text which tells us this. But Hades is constantly employed as, alike, the region of the dead and the place of woe;[7] the dwelling of evil spirits and of the lost.[8] There was indeed no little resemblance between the Hebrew ideas of the lower world and those of heathen antiquity. A "bottomless pit," reeking with poisonous vapours, and fancied to be the mouth of Pluto's fell king-

[1] Rev. ix. 1. [2] Enoch 86. [3] Rom. x. 7. [4] Luke viii. 31.
[5] Rev. ix. 12, 11; xi. 7; xvii. 8; xx. 1, 3. [6] Rev. i. 18. [7] Luke xvi. 23.
[8] Matt. xi. 23; xvi. 18; Luke x. 15; xiv. 23; Acts ii. 27; Rev. vi. 8; xxi. 13, 14.

dom, was an object of terror near Hierapolis, and must have been well known to John.[1] The Greeks and Romans alike believed these dark and terrible realms to be under the earth. Their gate, when entered, could not be repassed, and, as in the New Testament, there were in them two regions; the one for the blessed, the other for the condemned. The sixth book of the *Æneid* paints the bliss of the good and the tortures of the guilty shades in these dark abodes, in words,—now, worthy of Paradise; now, terrible as the description of hell in the Apocalypse.

When John sees this "abyss" in his vision, its key has been handed to the star-angel, who forthwith opens the awful prison house, from which, presently, a smoke rises, like that of a great furnace, such as men use for smelting iron,[2] darkening the sky. Such a fuliginous outburst he may possibly have seen, if he had lately sailed past the then volcanic island of Thera, in the Archipelago, in these years, in violent eruption. The smoke of its convulsions, like that from Etna and Stromboli, had been thought by all to rise from the penal fires of the lower world, and, so, John sees in the smoke from the abyss, that of the furnace-like lake of fire and brimstone, which he afterwards mentions,[3] prepared for the devil and his angels, and all the wicked. But the wild, eddying, black clouds, presently revealed a more terrible sight, for a countless number of monstrous locust-like beings poured on the earth from amidst it; recalling the locusts seen by Joel—"a nation strong and without number, with the teeth and the jaws of a great lion; like horses in their appearance, and running like cavalry;

[1] Pliny *Hist. Nat.* ii. 95. [2] Matt. xiii. 42, 50; Rev. i. 15; ix. 2.
[3] Rev. xx. 10, 14; xxi. 8.

leaping on the mountain tops with a noise like that of chariots, or of fire when it devours the stubble, and rushing on like a strong people set in battle array."[1] John's locusts, also, were "like horses prepared for war, and their sound was like that of chariots, and of many horses rushing to war." But not only were the pictures of Joel reproduced: the prophet seems to make use of an Arab poetical description of this form of plague, as "like horses in their heads, lions in their breasts, camels in their feet, serpents in their bodies, and the hair of women in their horns," or antennæ.[2] For these locusts seemed as if the gleaming top of their heads were gold crowns, while their faces were human and they had women's hair, and the teeth of lions, and stinging tails like scorpions, and their breasts seemed as if defended by iron breastplates. Like locusts, however, they were to have power to do harm for only a summer; locusts coming and disappearing in the five months of heat, as these were to do.[3] At the head of this army of the pit was, as might be expected, a king —the angel of the abyss—in Hebrew, Abaddon, "The Destroyer;" a name John uses interchangeably with the Greek, Apollyon, which means the same. The plagues that had been sent forth till now, had struck nature as well as man, but these hideous assailants were to touch only men, and such men alone as had not the seal of God on their foreheads. These they were to sting like scorpions; causing such misery that their victims would seek death, though only to find that they could not die. Among the rabbis, Abaddon is the name given to the lowest region of hell, which, indeed, is, as a whole, called by this ominous word;[4] now fitly given by John to the being who rules

[1] Joel i. 6; ii. 4, 5. [2] Düsterdieck. [3] Rev. ix. 5. [4] Schöttgen.

that awful empire, and is, as it were, its personification. But beyond the locusts conveying a terrible symbol of the woes to precede Christ's coming, it is vain to seek definite meanings for them. Yet we can at least feel assured that they were intended to stand for men, from their having human faces; though hardly for an army, since they were not to take life, but to spread such misery, short of doing so, as would make men sigh for death. The whole conception, in fact, seems only a vivid way of picturing distress, instigated by the powers of evil, but brought upon men by their fellows; such distress as times so out of joint abundantly produced in every form.

But the dream-scenery is about to change again. The huge, undefined tribulations just foreshadowed were, we may fear, too soon known by the churches; though buried, when that generation had passed away, under succeeding troubles as great; rising like earthquake waves, in all regions, almost from year to year, in those wild days, especially in Palestine. Suddenly, John hears a voice, it is not said whose, closing the scene of the locust-like army of the pit with the proclamation, that "The first woe is past: behold there come yet two woes hereafter."[1] Then there falls on the earth the sound of the sixth trumpet,[2] followed by a voice from the horns of the golden altar before God,—from off which the coals had been taken, that, when dashed on the earth, had so terribly avenged the sufferings of the martyrs on their enemies; in answer to their cry from under it. The voice, apparently that of God Himself, now carries out, still farther, the retribution on the world for its evil treatment of the Christians and

[1] Rev. ix. 12. [2] Rev. ix. 13.

for its other wickedness; commanding that four angels bound at the Euphrates, of whom we now first hear, be loosed. Who they were, or when bound, or why, is not told, though possibly the expression only means that these ministers of God had been hitherto restrained from going out on their errand of death, till the very "hour and day, and month, and year," had come; against which they had been appointed by God.[1] Their dreadful mission was to kill the third part of men. A fourth of mankind had already been destroyed by the pale rider;[2] "many" had died from the poisoning of the springs and rivers,[3] and now a third of all remaining were to be destroyed. More than half the whole population of the habitable globe is thus described, as perishing in the convulsions of nature and society, seen in dim gigantic outline, through the veil of the near future. But this is but an echo of the language of Christ Himself, when He warns those He was addressing, to flee from the "tribulation" they should one day see, for it would be "such as there had not been the like from the beginning of the creation until now, and never shall be."[4] Yet, after the accession of Vespasian to the empire, on July 1st A.D. 69, there was general peace, except in Judæa, where the agony of the Jewish revolt continued, till the taking of Jerusalem, in September of the next year. Nero had killed himself in 68, so that the fierce and terribly bloody civil wars that followed, till the final triumph of Vespasian, lasted little more than a year. It would appear, therefore, as if the imagery of the Apocalypse pointed, at least in this case, to Judæa; the only place where inconceivable miseries of the sword, famine, and pestilence, as fore-

[1] Rev. ix. 15. [2] Rev. vi. 8. [3] Rev. viii. 11. [4] Matt. xxiv. 21.

shadowed in his vision, could then have been suffered. Yet, this is impossible, since the men slain by the four angels were worshippers of the "devils" represented by idols of metal, or stone, or wood.[1] Perhaps it is best to interpret the imagery, as a whole, as a succession of hyperboles such as the East estimates less literally than the language seems to warrant. That the armies of cavalry following the angels are said to have numbered two hundred millions,[2] makes it at least sure that, in this particular, Oriental mode of speech had full play; for, of course, that number is simply impossible. The wish of the seer, we may presume, is merely to indicate, on the one hand, terrible sufferings among those visited by the Divine wrath, and, on the other, vast forces, seen or unseen, by which that wrath is carried out.

It is instructive—as an illustration of the close resemblance between the visions or trances of prophets or apostles and ordinary dreams, that, as in our dreams, while our physical powers are dormant, the imagination and other mental faculties, then, only, attain their highest activity and range—to find John recording the appearance, in his vision, as an image boding all that was most terrible in war, huge armies of cavalry coming from precisely that quarter from which, about a hundred years before, the invasion of the endless hordes of mounted Parthians had carried fire and slaughter through Judæa—their rough steppe horses bursting in on its peaceful landscapes, and after passing over them like a rushing storm, vanishing as suddenly as they came, leaving a smoking waste, silent in death and universal ruin, amid scenes, a few hours before, the homes of a peaceful and happy population. The wild

[1] Rev. ix. 20. [2] Rev. ix. 16.

yells of this dreadful barbarian enemy; like the bellowing of beasts; the hideous thunder of their countless drums; their breastplates and helmets of steel, glittering like lightning; their horses covered with brass and steel trappings; the faces of the horsemen painted like those of wild Indians; their matted hair gathered up on their foreheads, in Scythian fashion; their dreadful lances; their feigned retreats, in which their deadly arrows, fired backwards as they fled, were specially fatal behind them; their countless swarms hidden in the clouds of dust of their rushing advance; their spears, their slings, their blazing banners, gleaming with gold and silver, are all dwelt upon by the Roman historians, and filled the minds of men over all the Eastern provinces of the empire, from the days of Crassus, thirteen years before their invasion of Palestine, to the reign of Trajan, with indescribable terror. All this evidently rises in the unsleeping imagination of the seer, as he had heard of it from the survivors of a past generation; as waking impressions colour our visions of the night; and supplies imagery supremely fitting the evil times it has been given him to predict. In his trance he sees these awful enemies sweeping back again from across the Euphrates, on their lean, untiring horses, sweeping through every valley of Judæa, the embodiment of treachery, greed, and ruthless barbarity. His mind, full of the horrors impending on mankind, sees all this as if with the senses, and his dreaming imagination bodies it forth in colossal grandeur, as a picture of what is about to recur, to the sore misfortune of the world.

It may well be, moreover, that the remembrance of the dreaded Parthians rose in his wandering memory, from the universal excitement then reigning, about the expected

return of Nero from beyond the Euphrates, at the head of a vast army of these most bitter enemies of Rome, to fight his way to the throne again, with their help. The common people, everywhere, were firm in the belief that he was not dead; that the wound in his throat had been healed, and that he was, for the time only, in hiding, till the fitting moment came for crossing the Eastern frontiers. The prevalence of this conviction has already been noticed, but the subject bears so directly on the right understanding of the Apocalypse, that, even at the risk of repetition, I may quote some of the notices of antiquity on the subject. Suetonius affirms that Nero fled from Rome with the intention of seeking aid from the Parthians, and that, soon after his death, edicts appeared, as issued by him, proclaiming that he was alive, and would presently return, to the sore discomfiture of his enemies.[1] Twenty years after his death, Tacitus tells us, a false Nero found such high favour among the Parthians, that they were like to take up arms on his behalf. Galba is made by the same authority, to say, that Nero will always be regretted by the unworthy, and that the effort must be, to keep him from being regretted by better people. Otho was credited with the wish to honour him as a means of securing the favour of the masses, and the monster's statues were even set up again by some.[2] Greece and Asia, he tells us, were terrified by a false alarm that he was indeed coming back, and might appear at any moment; the adventurer being a slave of Pontus, a famous player on the harp, whose story I have already told.[3] Another pretender found sympathy among the Parthians in the days of Titus, and hoped to win the empire by their

[1] Sueton. *Nero*, 47, 57. [2] Tac. *Hist.* i. 2, 16, 78. [3] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 8.

help,[1] and we are told that, even so late as about the year 100, "every one wished he were alive, and the majority believed he was really so, though then he would have been sixty-three years old."[2]

This strange and ominous belief must have fallen with the most terrible effect on the ears of the Christians, who had looked on Nero, ever since the massacres of their brethren in 64, after the burning of Rome, as assuredly the Antichrist; the incarnation of the prince of devils, ruling the evil hosts of the abyss. This persuasion throws strong light on much that is yet to come in the Apocalypse, and shows how readily the idea of the Parthians would mingle with the dark anticipations of the future, sent from above into the mind of the seer. For, beyond question, the hosts he now saw let loose by the four angels, must have recalled the memory of these barbarians, who were such terrors of the age. The hordes that poured on, in the vision, were the very counterparts of these fierce hosts, in their fiery blue-and-brimstone coloured mail, on horses the wild manes of which made their heads look like those of lions; their dilated nostrils seeming to the awe-stricken beholder, to breathe flame and sulphurous smoke; their very breath appearing to kill men. Yet this terrible imagery may have, in part, been suggested by the picture of "Leviathan" in Job, out of whose mouth "go burning torches, and a smoke out of his nostrils; his breath kindles coals."[3] The mention of brimstone is, moreover, a sign that the hosts of the vision came from the pit.[4] But one detail, though easily applicable to forms like scorpions, is much less so to

[1] Cassius Dio. lxiv. 9.
[2] Dio. Chrysostomus, *Orat.* xxi. 10.
[3] Job xli. 19–21.
[4] Rev. xiv. 10; xix. 20; xxi. 8.

horses, for their tails were "like serpents, and had heads," and with them, as well as their breath, "they did hurt." It looks as if John had noticed the sculptures on a huge altar to Jupiter, at Pergamos, which the passion in Asia Minor for worshipping the reigning emperor, had transferred to Nero. Standing before the temple which Christ had denounced, from this very fact, as "Satan's throne,"[1] it was adorned with great sculptures of the victory of the gods of Olympus over the giants, and these were carved with tails for legs; the tails ending in heads with open jaws.[2] So thoroughly did the faculties, even under inspiration, retain, outside of it, all their human characteristics: gathering material for their imagery from all sources, as the mind does in all ages, in its waking or dreaming reveries.

But the judgment which, by this fearful agency, mowed down a third of the population of the heathen world, failed to lead the survivors to abandon the idolatry which had brought it on them.[3] "They did not repent of worshipping the idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk, and are only the work of their own hands, and are devils, not gods." Nor did they give up their "murders, sorceries fornication, and thefts;" sins which stand for heathen ungodliness as a whole. Those who had been sealed to God had not been stricken with this last curse, which the sixth trumpet had let loose on the nations, but the cry of the saints below the altar, to "judge and avenge their blood on them that dwell on the earth" was, indeed, being heard.[4]

[1] Rev. ii. 13. [2] Fabricius u. Trendelenburg, *Pergamon*, 64.
[3] Rev. ix. 20, 21. [4] Rev. vi. 10.

This scene now fades away; the abyss and its legions having done their work, the "insubstantial pageant" vanishes; to give place, shortly, to another similar creation, revealing another step in the approach of the final judgment and the appearing of Christ, which was now "at the door."

The great world drama was, for the moment, however, interrupted in its advance to the final catastrophe, by another pause. Looking up from the earth, to which it would seem, he had now, in his vision, returned,[1] John sees another mighty angel coming down out of heaven, who appears invested with some of the attributes of Jehovah.[2] He is not only invested with almighty powers, but, we are told, he was also enrobed in a cloud, just as Christ had said he would come,[3] and as he is represented in the Apocalypse itself, as coming.[4] To come in clouds, indeed, is the distinctive mark of the divine presence, alike among the Hebrews and antiquity at large, as when Horace casts them round "the beaming shoulders of Apollo."[5] "The rainbow," moreover, which we only meet elsewhere in the Apocalypse, "round about the throne" of God,[6] rested on his head, and his face, like that of Christ,[7] shone like the sun, and his feet, also like those of our Lord, glowed as if they burned in a furnace, or like the glittering columns of burnished brass which John had often seen in front of temples.[8]

The book received from the throne by the Lamb had been closed by seven seals, but this angel held in his right hand, a small open roll; a sign that the divine

[1] Rev. x. 1. [2] Gen. xviii. [3] Luke xxi. 27. [4] Rev. i. 7.
[5] Horace, lib. i. Od. 2, 31. [6] Rev. iv. 3.
[7] Rev. i. 16. [8] Rev. i. 15; ii. 18.

decrees in it were forthwith to be fulfilled; for in those times the decrees of majesty, when suspended in execution, were sealed up, but when ordered to be presently carried out were laid open. Alighting on the earth the wondrous form set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the land,[1] so that his stature must have been, indeed, colossal; reminding us of the angel of the Lord, whom David saw, standing between the earth and the heaven.[2] But now he calls the earth to hearken to his words anon to follow; his voice sounding like the roar of a lion, as is said, in the old prophets, of that of Jehovah in His anger,[3] —so closely does John copy Old Testament imagery. The figure indeed seems to have been a popular one in those days, for it is used also of the voice of the Messiah, in Second Esdras, a book of the same date as the Apocalypse.[4] To this awful cry, the seven thunders which had sounded when the angels lifted their trumpets to proclaim the judgments of God—thunders which were the very voice of Jehovah[5]—added their awful Amen, in solemn confirmation. But though John heard the words of the mighty herald, it was not permitted him to write them down. Like some spoken to Daniel, they were to be "shut up and sealed," as relating to an as yet unrevealed future.[6] The prohibition was to be withdrawn before the book was finished, for then the time of fulfilment would be "at hand."[7] The disclosure of the final judgment was not to be made in the next scene of the vision, but later.

[1] Rev. x. 3 ff.
[2] 1 Chron. xxi. 16.
[3] Amos i. 2; ii. 8; Hos. xi. 10; Joel iv. 16.
[4] 2 Esdras xi. 37; xii. 31.
[5] Ps. xxix. 39.
[6] Dan. viii. 26; xii. 4, 9; Rev. x. 4.
[7] Rev. xxii. 10.

But he was soon to see and hear much which he was free to put down.

The mighty form standing upon the sea and the earth presently lifted up his right hand,—as is said of Jehovah, by Isaiah, when He condescended to engage to bless Jerusalem,[1]—and swore,—as a sign that the decree was irrevocable—"by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein,"[2] that there should be time no longer: no more delay—no more respite granted to mankind: their final judgment would now be carried out.

"In the days of the voice of the seventh angel," he continued, "when he sets himself to sound the seventh—the last—trumpet—not later, but not sooner, the mystery of God will be finished—literally completed and ended, according to the good tidings which He had already declared to His servants, the prophets."[3]

The great voice now ceased, but presently that which John had previously heard from heaven, again spoke, telling him to go to the angel and take from him the book open in his hand. Having done so, he was to "eat it up;" a figure of speech common among the Jews from early times, and equivalent to our phrase about "devouring a book"—that is, making it thoroughly our own, by deep pondering on its contents. The rabbis, and our Lord Himself, indeed, make use of it, for it is required by both, that fervent disciples of the Messiah must eat His flesh and drink His blood."[4] Jeremiah also had

[1] Isa. lxii. 8. [2] Deut. xxxii. 40; Dan. xii. 7; Gen. xiv. 22; Exod. xx. 11.
[3] Amos iii. 7; Rev. x. 7.
[4] John vi. 51, 53, 56. See Lightfoot on these verses, vol. iii. 306 ff.

used the same figure, declaring of the words of God, that "they were found and I did eat them, and they were a joy to me and the rejoicing of my heart,"[1] and Ezekiel tells us that a roll or book was given him to eat, and on his doing so, it was, as in John's case, as sweet as honey in his mouth.[2] But though the "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" written both inside and out, on that of Ezekiel, did not bring after it bitterness to his heart, it was different with John.[3] The revelations to be made to him were at first sweet, for he would be told to measure the Temple, and thus secure its safety and that of the worshippers in it, amidst the troubles coming on the Holy City, but they would be bitter in their announcement that Jerusalem was, for a time, to be "trodden under foot" by the heathen; the doom of the world being suspended till God's purposes with the Temple City had been disclosed. And now, as if the knowledge permitted him to receive in the small book, had qualified him to do so, he was told that though for the moment forbidden to "prophesy," by making known what he had heard, he was hereafter to do so, again, respecting "many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings," and to this permission we owe the rest of the book.[4]

A new scene now opens, but instead of a revelation in symbol, of the final destiny of the world at large, a prophecy of the fortunes of Jerusalem is pictured before

[1] Jer. xv. 16. [2] Ezek. iii. 1–3.

[3] With us the seat of emotions is the heart: in antiquity, it was guessed to be in the bowels, and hence they are mentioned as the part stricken with sorrow. Gen. xliii. 30; 1 Kings iii. 26; Eccles. v. 4; 2 Cor. vi. 12; Phil. i. 8; ii. 1; Col. iii. 12, &c. For the opinion of other races see σπλάγχνον in the Lexicons.

[4] Rev. x. 11.

the seer, in emblematic imagery. The vision of Ezekiel,[1] in which an angel is seen measuring the Temple, forms, undoubtedly, the ground-material of John's vision also. A measuring-reed is put into his hand and he is told to measure the Temple of God—the building proper, and the altar of burnt-offering, standing before the Holy Place, with the worshippers at it; the courts of the priests and those of the men and women being thus included. The outer court of the Gentiles was not, however, to be measured; but to be passed over, and "cast out," because it, and also the city, had been already seized by the heathen foe, who were to tread it under foot for forty-two months—three years and a half. This is the time, in the vision of Daniel, during which Jerusalem was to be oppressed by Antiochus,[2] already alluded to by Christ as "the times of the Gentiles,"[3] in reference to the profanation of the Holy City by the Romans, as it is now, more fully, by John, here. But he himself, as we have seen, is to survive the catastrophe.[4] Nothing is said of the destruction of the Temple, for no Jew could conceive of this "dwelling-place" of Jehovah being allowed by Him to perish, though Christ Himself had said that it would be utterly overthrown. Indeed, even when shut up in Jerusalem by Titus, none dreamed that, though the enemy might take the city and the Temple grounds, as far as the barrier, to pass beyond which was death to a heathen, they would ever be permitted to injure the holy building,—the seat of a worship of which, as they fancied, that in heaven itself was only an imitation; and John was apparently of the same opinion. All else might be profaned by heathen feet, but

[1] Ezek. xl. 3; xlii. 20.
[2] Dan. ix. 27; vii. 25; xii. 7.
[3] Luke xxi. 24.
[4] Rev. x. 11.

the Temple, the altar, and the courts of the worshipping Israelites, were under God's protection and would remain safe. Even John of Gischala, one of the fiercest of the Zealots, proclaimed, when Roman fire already leaped up the outer walls of its courts, that the Temple itself could never be hurt. This belief, indeed, was so profound, that it imposed on the Romans themselves; deserters to the Jews being numerous even to the last days of the siege; their confidence in the inviolability of the Temple being greater than in the battering-rams of Titus.[1] John clung, moreover, to the period of three years and a half given in Daniel, as the limit of the profanation of the Holy City —after which its deliverance was to come; for thus his generation read that prophecy. The Temple was, hence, in his view, to be the sacred space in which the faithful might find safety for the forty-two months of invasion— the half of a "week of years," first used by Daniel, and borrowed from that book by later Apocalyptic writers.

The measuring commanded was, therefore, to secure the safety of the true worshippers of God; not for their judgment. The Gentiles might get possession of the city, and even of the outworks in the Temple grounds, but could not be allowed to come into the parts safeguarded by the symbolical act of the prophet. It is vain to ask how much, in such a vision, is to be taken literally, or how much was intended only for a vivid prophetic vision, in a highly-wrought poetical form; the safest course is to remember that we have only the pictures of a dream before us, which paints, in Oriental style, the general truth, that the Christians would be under the protection of God, in the troubles coming on the Holy City, but

[1] Jos. *Bell. Jud.* vi. 2, 1; Dio. Cass. lxvi. 5.

permits John to do so in accordance with the contemporary interpretation of the ancient oracles.

The same unnamed speaker who had commanded John to measure the Temple—who must, from what follows, have been Christ Himself—presently informs him, that two witnesses in Jerusalem, would preach to the population for 1260 days, which, at thirty days to a month make up the three years and a half. They would be clad in sackcloth, the robe of mourning worn by prophets when urging repentance, and would not proclaim judgment, but would seek to lead the people back to Jehovah. Who they were is not hinted, nor is it possible to say, for Antipas, who was killed in Pergamos as a Christian,[1] is called by our Lord His witness, and hence the name may be used here of other 'faithful ones," of no special distinction except their fidelity to their Master. Nor is it necessary to limit the number to two, for in the idealisation of a vision two may have been named as representives of many more. Possibly John, full of Jewish beliefs, may have thought, with the rabbis, that before the advent of the Messiah, Moses and Elijah would come to call the nation to repentance; this being perhaps impressed the more deeply from the appearance of both on the Mount of Transfiguration. The belief in a coming reappearance of Elijah is, indeed, still fixed in the mind of Jew and Moslem. The latter believe that Elijah is "the Immortal One," who, in the freshness of youth, is always appearing, though unrecognised, to set right the wrong; while the Jews hold that he had appeared again and again, in the garb of an Arabian merchant, to wise and holy rabbis, in their journeys and at their prayers. A seat is still placed

[1] Rev. ii. 13.

for him at the circumcision of Jewish boys, and to this day, at the Passover, the Jews when they place the Paschal Cup on the table, set the door wide open, in the belief that at that moment of the ceremony he will one day return.[1] In the Gospels, indeed, we learn from Christ's disciples that some thought He was John the Baptist, returned from the dead; others, Elijah; others, Jeremiah, and others, one of the prophets;[2] supposing him not to be the very Messiah, but a witness for him, such as they expected before his appearance. But though Jewish belief looked to such eminent saints of old times as appointed to herald the coming of the Messiah, and though both Elijah and Moses appeared at the Transfiguration, there is nothing in the narrative of the troubles of Jerusalem which points to any specially noted confessors, either of the Jewish or Christian faiths, as having made their appearance.

In a vision of Zechariah, Joshua, the high-priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, are symbolised by two olive trees, which are seen standing, one on each side of the great seven-branched golden candlestick,[3] and, as such, are named "the two that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." In John's vision, he who talks with him now calls the two witnesses, "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth." The very language of Zechariah is thus borrowed, and also the symbol he uses, with the addition of the witnesses being called "candlesticks," as the seven churches have been, in an earlier chapter.[4] As Elijah destroyed those seeking to harm him, by consuming them

[1] Mal. iv. 5; Matt. xvii. 10.
[2] Matt. xvi. 14.
[3] Zech. iv. 3, 11, 14.
[4] Rev. i. 20.

by fire from heaven,[1] these "witnesses" have power to "devour their enemies by fire" launched against them at their word. Like Elijah, also, they have power to shut the heavens, so that it shall not rain during the time they "prophesy," that is, for three years and a half—the very time named by our Lord and St. James, as that of the drought which followed the words of the great prophet.[2] Like Moses, moreover, they have power to turn the waters into blood, and they even go beyond him, since they may smite the earth with every plague, as often as they think fit.[3] During the time of their calling men to repent, no one would be suffered to hurt them, but when their mission was over, that awful emblem of the Roman power, or, rather, of Nero, reappearing as Antichrist,—"the beast that comes out of the abyss,"[4] or, like those in Daniel,[5] out of the sea,[6]—which, in Jewish ideas, was an entrance to the abyss,[7]—would war against them, and kill them. There was thus to be an interval during which Christianity would be proclaimed in peace, but after that brief calm, Satan, acting through Rome, would break out against it; "authority," we are told, being given this fell enemy, over "every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation," and "to make war with the saints, and to overcome them," for just the time during which the witnesses had preached—"forty-two months."[8] But not only are these witnesses to be killed; the extreme indignity is to be shown them of leaving their bodies unburied, on the streets of Jerusalem—"the

[1] 2 Kings i. 10 ff
[2] 1 Kings xviii. 1; Luke iv. 25; James v. 17
[3] Rev. xi. 6.
[4] Rev. ix. 1, 2, 11; xx. 13.
[5] Dan vii. 3.
[6] Rev. xiii. 1.
[7] Luke viii. 31.
[8] Rev. xiii. 5–7.

great city,[1] where also their Lord was crucified." [2] No outrage could be greater, no contempt more bitter, in the eyes of antiquity.[3] It was a religious duty among the Greeks, to cast earth over a body found unburied, and the Jews thought the doing so especially meritorious before God.[4] Sophocles, in his *Ajax*, and his *Antigone*, glorifies the burial of the dead, in the face of all danger. Indeed, to abandon corpses, even to pursue and rout a defeated enemy, was a capital crime in a naval commander. But this insult was to be shown the bodies of the Jerusalem martyrs, for those "from among the peoples, and tribes, and tongues, and nations," present in the city, "looked on their corpses, and would not suffer them to be laid in a tomb."[5] John sees, as it were, the state of things bewailed in one of the later Psalms—

"O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance;
Thy holy temple have they defiled;
They have laid Jerusalem on heaps.
The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat to the fowls of the heaven,
The flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.
Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem;
And there was none to bury them."[6]

But this treatment of the Christians, and the hideous demoralisation of the population generally, as faction and wild passions of every kind, grew with the progress of anarchy and rebellion. Zealot and hired murderer, both furiously intent on what they fancied the glory of the Law, turned Jerusalem into a pandemonium so terrible,

[1] This is a very frequent name for Rome in the Apocalypse (Rev. xiv. 8; xvi. 19; xvii. 18; xviii. 2, 10, 16, 18, 19, 21.

[2] Rev. xi. 8. [3] Ps. lxxix. 2. [4] Tobit xii. 12.

[5] Rev. xi. 9. [6] Ps. lxxix. 1–3.

now, as the curtain was about to fall, that it wearied out the long-suffering of God, and the cup of their iniquity was, at last, pronounced to be full! No wonder John, like the prophets, called her Sodom, for her wickedness, and Egypt, as the type of hatred of the people of God. Isaiah had thus denounced her long centuries before.[1] Ezekiel had branded her as Sodom,[2] and Jeremiah had declared that her prophets and people had become to God, like the foul Cities of the Plain.[3] Josephus has left us a passage strikingly illustrative of these bitter words, as now uttered by John.[4] "The rage of the Idumeans," says he, "sent for by the Zealots, was not slaked by widespread massacre. They now invaded every house, plundering and murdering. Tired at last with killing the common people, they hunted out the two high-priests, Ananus and Jesus, and having killed them, stood over the dead bodies, jeering at them. They even cast away dead bodies without burial, though the Jews usually are so careful in this matter that they bury even crucified persons before the sun sets."[5] Thus, like the witnesses, the supreme dignitaries of the Temple, who, but a brief time before, had been revered, as they stood clad in the holy vestments presiding over the worship of the people, were now left naked and cast out, "a prey to the dogs and wild beasts" —the yellow long-muzzled scavenger-dogs of the town, and the jackals that stole in, by night, from the hills.

Rejoicing in their triumph in the murder of the two witnesses, John sees the rabble of Jerusalem send presents to each other, in the fulness of their hearts, that all might be glad with them,[6] as Nehemiah sent portions to all

[1] Isa. i. 9, 10. [2] Ezek. xvi. 46, 49. [3] Jer. xxiii. 14.
[4] Rev. xi. 8. [5] *Bell. Jud.* iv. 5, 2. [6] Rev. xi. 9.

who had not partaken of the feast at the public reading of the law,[1] or as the Jews did, when they feasted, on their victory over their would-be murderers, in Persia.[2] So thankful were they, to be rid of the keen words and terrifying wonders of these confessors! But the vision now showed a repetition of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, for the corrupt bodies of these martyrs were quickened, after three days and a half, by the breath of God, and "stood up upon their feet," to the great terror of all.[3] Presently, moreover, the newly-raised men heard a great voice from heaven, commanding them to "come up" to it, and so they ascended to God, like Elijah,[4] or like Enoch; but veiled in the glory of a cloud, like Jesus, when He rose from Olivet. A great earthquake followed, killing 7000 persons, but those who escaped had been so moved by the preaching and death of the witnesses and "affrighted" at this judgment, that "they gave glory to the God of heaven." While the death of a third part of their population had brought no repentance on the heathen world, Jerusalem had been purified by the troubles it had experienced, and was once more the city of God. There is no anticipation that it would at this time perish. It was again the "beloved city."[5] Its penitence had been like that of Nineveh, and had saved it; as the repentance of the Assyrian capital had warded off from it threatened wrath.

The Church was, thus, to witness, for a time, amidst the uproar and chaos of the beleagured Jerusalem; the few members who had not fled, in obedience to Christ's warnings, when Vespasian approached, no doubt bravely

[1] Neh. viii. 10–12. [2] Esth. ix. 19, 21. [3] Rev. xi. 11.
[4] 2 Kings. ii. 11. [5] Rev. xx. 9.

testifying, in the face of the furious mob of dagger-men and Zealots of all types, that the true Messiah had already come—Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified—and that no other Messiah was to be expected. But the faithfulness of its testimony was to be avenged by the sons of Belial, in their death who bore it. Yet from that death a new heavenly life would spring, that was to spread the kingdom of Christ over all lands.

CHAPTER XII

THE PASSING BELL IN JUDÆA

GLAD to escape from the "tribulation" he had shared with his brethren in the district of the seven churches, John had sought peace and retirement from the noise of Ephesus, and its heathen life, in the quiet of Patmos, thirteen hours' sail, with a fair wind, from the great city. Here, in one of the peaceful valleys, with its thinly-scattered olive-trees, he was as much shut out from the world and alone with God, as Elijah had been at Cherith, or John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judæa, or Jesus in the Quarantania, during the forty days, or Paul in "Arabia." Preoccupied by "the signs of the times," always so dear a study to the Jew,[1] and especially absorbing to the Christians of the day; craving as they did, to know "the signs of His coming" whom they hourly expected, this supreme thought engrossed his whole nature. His faculties strained to abnormal elevation, he lived for the time in a world of vision; the providence of God guiding and using this trance-like ecstasy, to disclose to the churches, through their favourite medium of apocalyptic pictures and poetical creations, the divine purposes towards the Church and the world. Yet, though mysterious scenes passed before his inward sight, his eyes, like those of Balaam, continued open to

[1] Matt. xvi. 3; xxiv. 24; Luke xxi. 11; John iv. 48.

things around, and his mind dwelt tenderly on the distant home of his people, where the great drama of prophecy was even now being enacted. In spirit he stands on the shore at Cæsarea, and sees the Roman legions landing from Egypt and the West:[1] the wild cavalry forces of the Parthians gather before him, on the other side of the Euphrates;[2] the caves and rocks of the Palestine mountains, in which men hide from the fury of war; the locusts, and frogs, and scorpions, that infest the land in the hot months, are not forgotten.[3] Round his island, his thoughts notice the heaving sea, and the passing ships.[4] Rumours of violent convulsions reach him; earthquakes in many places, and volcanic eruptions, during which a new island rises from the ocean: and the volcanoes of Thera, sending out great floods of fiery lava, into the waters, as if the burning mountain itself were hurled into it;[5] the fish dying from the heated waters; the ships wrecked and sunk, and even inland springs and rivers polluted by the sulphurous exhalations and impurities.[6] The voice of Christ speaking to him, seems like that of the multitudinous waters of the ocean, ever resounding close at hand. But even when Jesus, through His angel, is about to show him what must shortly come to pass, the warnings and exhortations regard the present moment. The churches must see that there is oil in their lamps, and that they are clad in the wedding garment, for "the time is at hand" when their Lord "will come in clouds, and every eye shall see Him; even they who pierced Him on the cross."[7]

Through fugitives from the evil times, or travelling

[1] Rev. xiii. 1. [2] Rev. ix. 16. [3] Rev. vi. 15; ix. 3, 10; xvi. 14.
[4] Rev. viii. 10. [5] Rev. viii. 9. [6] Rev. viii. 7–10. [7] Rev. i. 3, 7.

brethren, seeking, as Jews habitually did, business or work wherever they could find it, John had learned the story of the churches in Palestine, in these years. He had, evidently, been told how the wild storms now passing into the great war, had thinned the ranks of the Christians. The fury against the brethren of Hannas the younger, in 58, when he killed St. James, the brother of Christ, must with him, have destroyed many of the leading men of the hated sect, and have left the survivors helpless in the midst of a fanatical populace who mocked at their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

But the awful persecution by Nero, which overwhelmed the Christians at Rome in 64, made any local sufferings in Judæa seem light. Doubtless, the Palestine churches, like their brethren everywhere, saw, in the massacre at Rome, "the beginning of sorrows," which Daniel had taught them must come. The words of Christ, moreover, seemed to mark the troubled times as showing the signs He had given of the near approach of His advent. The days foretold by the ancient prophet, when "some of understanding should stumble, to try them and to purge them from sin, and make them white, for the time of the end,"[1] appeared to have come. Ungodliness waxed great, and love decayed. Political events destroyed interest in religious questions. Some even of the quiet Essenes were moved by the public commotions, to leave their peaceful communities, and join the Zealots in their fighting for the Law, and, as the revolution developed, many of the Christians began to follow their example.[2] The proclamations of the supposed prophets, moreover, announcing the imminent appearance of the Messiah, drew the multitude,

[1] Dan. xi. 35. [2] *Bell. Jud.* ii. 8, 10.

now here, now there, and enticed after them not a few of the brethren. All the more, those still faithful clung to the warnings of Christ,[1] how to act in these last times. They remembered that they were cautioned to give no ear to these self-styled prophets, or their signs and wonders.[2] His coming was not to be secret like that of their promised Christs, but would shine like the lightning, from east to west. They had seen all the insurrectionary dreams end in blood, instead of signs and wonders from heaven. But Christ's earnest dehortations imply that too many weakly listened to such agitators, and set out, with wife and children, to the wilderness, or to the Mount of Olives, or to the Jordan, in the hope of seeing the promised signs of the Son of Man, but only to be speared or trampled down by the Roman cavalry. They had been foretold that they would have to suffer persecutions from their fellow-Jews, and they had suffered them. As Christ said, they had been delivered up to Sanhedrims, and they had been beaten in synagogues, and had stood before governors and kings, for their Master's sake.[3] They had endured much from such fanatical enemies as Paul, before his conversion, and the procurators, and high-priests like the younger Hannas, and Ananias the son of Nebedai, strove to crush a sect which was universally hated.[4] The lofty enthusiasm of many humble confessors, when before their judges, had, however, inspired their brethren with a stronger faith than ever; for it seemed as if, in very deed, Christ's words had been fulfilled in them, that the Holy Ghost would put words in their mouths in their hour of trial. But if the fiery ordeal

[1] Matt. xxiv., &c. [2] Matt. xxiv. 5, 24 ff. [3] Matt. xiii. 9 ff.
[4] Matt. x. 22; Mark xiii. 13; Luke xxi. 17.

made heroes, it also made traitors. There were, doubtless, confessors, in these last days of Jerusalem, who might be fittingly painted by John as witnesses, preaching in sackcloth, but finally killed, like their Master, for their reproachful fidelity, and dishonoured even after death; but immortal in their work, on earth, and, in their spirits, in heaven. Yet the worst foes of the little Christian community, as our Saviour tells us, were those of their own households.[1] The agony of the times; the strained excitement, and even their very zeal for the honour of God and His law, warped by the spirit around them, had made many "stumble," and many others betray and hate their brethren; the love to Christ and to each other, of "the many," or as we say, the larger number, "waxing cold," as iniquity thus multiplied within the fold as well as outside of it.[2] Still worse, the rift that had divided the nation, divided also its families. In many which were partly Christian, they began to hate each other: the converts to the Nazarene becoming fancied traitors; especially in the eyes of heated fanaticism, which looked to the pretended prophets, who promised the immediate advent of the Messiah, to win a world-triumph for Israel with the sword. Brother delivered up brother to death, and the father his child; children rose up against parents, and brought about their imprisonment, or scourging, or death, and at the sight of such internal strife the Christians became hated by all men.[3] The general demoralisation of society, moreover, naturally increased as order perished, till, at last, any friends of peace, the brethren among others, were hunted down by the Irreconcilables, and killed, wherever found.

[1] Matt. x. 36. [2] Matt. xxiv. 12. [3] Matt. x. 21.

The confident belief, however, that Jesus would assuredly appear, now that matters were thus so fearful, kept the best of the Christians together. But when Menahem the son of Judas the Gaulonite, Eleazar the son of Simon ben Giora, and John of Gischala, established themselves in the Temple, in robes imitating those assigned by Christians to the Messiah; when one Messiah murdered the other; when the Temple had literally become a den of robbers, and the warlike engines which Cestius had removed, were set up again in the holy grounds, and when the shots fired from them by Eleazar and Simon, were carrying death into the crowded streets, the Christians resolved to flee from the city, as directed, in such circumstances, by the words of Christ Himself. These words, indeed, it was believed, had been repeated to the chief brethren by an angel, who commanded them to flee to Pella, a little town, east of the Jordan, but not far from it,—the most northerly of the "ten (allied) towns" or "Decapolis," as one of which it was, or had been a "free city."[1] It lay on the slope of a hill, overlooking a well-watered ravine, and had originally been a Macedonian colony, which would naturally make it a quiet retreat from Jewish fanaticism. The band of Alexander's veterans who had founded it had given it its name, but it had passed through varying fortune, having been taken by the Jews about a hundred and fifty years before the flight of the Christians to it, and having suffered much from their bigoted masters. It had since become nominally Syrian, but had been assailed by the Zealots at the opening of the great insurrection, in the year 66. Vespasian had, however, driven out these revolutionaries,

[1] Euseb. "Church Hist." iii. 5.

and quieted all the country east of the Jordan, so that the refugees from the churches of Jerusalem and Judæa had nothing to fear after reaching it.

The profanation of the Temple by the Zealots had already driven away many of the Jews themselves from Jerusalem; such outrages on its sanctity appearing to them the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel, which was believed to foreshadow the approaching fall of both Temple and city.[1] Jesus Himself, in accordance with the same prophecy, had told His followers that when they saw this "abomination," standing in the holy place, those who were in Judæa were to flee to the mountains, and he who was on the flat roof of his house was not to come down, to take anything out of his house, but was to flee along the flat roofs of the other houses, till he got outside the walls; while the labourer in the field was not to run home for his abba, but was to be glad to escape even without his coat.[2] Yet, as we see in the Apocalypse, as least two witnesses for the Master remained in the city; thinking, perhaps, that He would appear first in Jerusalem, while those who fled may have assumed that His return would be everywhere visible, since He had compared it to the lightning, which comes forth from the East and is seen even to the West.[3]

The position of the Jerusalem Christians must, indeed, have been terrible. What agony is implied in the words of Christ. "Woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!" And, "pray that your flight be not in winter, or on a Sabbath," when you can only travel 2000 steps from the city wall.[4] No wonder

[1] *Bell. Jud.* iv. 6. 3; *Vita*, ix. 4.
[2] Matt. xxiv. 15–18.
[3] Matt. xxiv. 27.
[4] Matt. xxiv. 19, 20.

He adds that, unless these days had been shortened, for the sake of the elect, no flesh would have been saved.[1] Many, no doubt, in spite of our Lord's warning, would have to flee on a Sabbath, when flight meant exposure to sore punishment for violation of the holy day, as well as to deep self-reproach. Winter, the rainy season, would bar their way by its wild swollen torrents, and would drench them with storms, from which, as fugitives hated by all, they could find no shelter; a sore extreme of misery and peril which John describes in highly-wrought metaphors, pointing to tempests and floods as often fatal to those fleeing in these evil times.[2] Josephus paints a scene that must often have been repeated, on a smaller scale, in the experience of the Christians. The fugitives from a village east of Jordan, he tells us, thought to reach Jericho, but the Roman cavalry drove them to the edge of the Jordan, then swollen and unfordable, so that they could not cross, and were, in part, cut down; in part, forced into the water and drowned.[3] But danger was not over when the Christians had crossed the Jordan, as the rage of the non-Jewish population burnt fiercely against all Jews; for the outrages of the Zealots had wasted the east of Jordan with fire and sword. Yet, when Pella was at last reached, the brethren had to praise God for leading them to a peaceful refuge. On the high-road to Damascus, pleasantly situated on the edge of a healthy table-land, hidden among hills, among murmuring streams and groves of olives, they could peacefully await in it the Advent they presently expected.[4] Christ was to come "immediately after the tribulations of those days," which

[1] Matt. xxiv. 22. [2] Rev. xii. 15. [3] *Bell. Jud.* iv. 7, 5.
[4] Matt. xxiv. 29–31.

they fancied must be those through which they were passing. Had He not said that "this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished"?[1] Had He not also said to the apostles, that they should not "have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come"? But too many had grown weary at the delay, and had fallen back into their old life, like the servant whose absent Lord delayed his coming, and who therefore began to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.[2] Yet, to the faithful, everything seemed to point to the almost immediate descent of their glorified Lord from the heavens, amidst His hosts of angels, to reward His saints, and to pour out wrath on His foes. The rumours of the impending restoration of the awful Nero, the earthquakes and other alarming signs in nature, and even the mystical import of prophetic numbers, appeared to show that He was "at the door."

Meanwhile, John, in his seagirt chamber of meditation; alone with God and his own soul; pondering over the hallowed rolls of ancient Scripture, and recalling all the story of redemption, from the Incarnation at Bethlehem till now; lived, for the time, abidingly "in the Spirit;" withdrawn from sublunary things, and favoured by ever-changing revelations of the nearly-closed drama of the last days, disclosed, from above, in mystic imagery, vague and sublime, such as he and his nation loved. How often, from the top of the westward sloping ridge, must he have seen, far below, in the rays of the setting sun, when calm rested on all nature, a sea of glass mingled with fire, stretching away, illimitably, to the fading light! How often, when darkness veiled the

[1] Matt. xxiv. 34; Mark xiii. 30; Luke xxi. 32. [2] Matt. xxiv. 28, 29.

landscape, and drew aside the curtain from eternity, must the heavens have opened to him, till the very throne of God and the Lamb, seemed to shine down on him, with the innumerable hosts of angels, and the general assembly and Church of the first-born, and the spirits of just men made perfect, worshipping before it! Till now, the opening of the sealed book by the Lamb, had disclosed the story of the Church from the time when Christ had ascended to the Father; the white horse with its crowned rider, going forth conquering and to conquer, appearing, in one aspect, to bring before him the victories of the Cross; in another, the fierce wars which threatened the eastern world. Other emblems of wars, famines, and pestilence had followed, and then the imagery of new steps in the ways of God had risen before him. The cry of the martyrs under the altar had, already, been terribly answered, in wars and convulsions of the earth; for since the year 60, Palestine had been shaken to its foundations by subterranean forces, Laodicea and Colosse overthrown, and Pompeii and Herculaneum shattered, though presently rebuilt; only, however, to be buried finally, a little later, in the year 79, in the outburst of Vesuvius. The skies had been lighted up by falling stars: the raging of the sea, the frequency of fatal lightning storms, and the appearance of a comet, had alarmed the nations, and roused Nero to pacify the gods, at each omen, by floods of illustrious blood.[1] The Jewish war, which was, with John, the beginning of the end, had at last broken out. The predictions of our Lord as to the last days were being fulfilled. The servants of God had been sealed, to keep them faithful, and to protect them. The earth had

[1] Tac. *Ann.* xiv. 27; xv. 22, 47; *Hist.* i. 3, 18.

been wasted by the terrible judgments following the sounding of six of the seven trumpets of the angels who stand before God, but they had not moved the heathen to repentance. And they had, at last, exhausted the long-suffering of God. A mighty angel standing on earth and sea, had lifted up his hand and sworn by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that there would be no longer delay in the final judgment of His enemies. The end was at hand.

But first there had been a brief respite. Jerusalem had been offered repentance. The two witnesses had borne their testimony to Christ as the Messiah, amidst the terrors of the time when the city had been given over to the heathen, and only the Temple building itself and the courts of the worshippers remained under divine protection. The faithful confessors had been murdered during the three years and a half of this triumph of the servants of idols, but had been raised from the dead and taken up to heaven. Jerusalem had been shaken by an earthquake and had repented, turning penitently to God and giving Him glory, and, thus, while the heathen world was hopelessly doomed for refusing to do this, Jerusalem was once more the chosen of Heaven, the beloved city. Such were John's anticipations, now, towards the close of the great siege.

I have recapitulated these visions to keep the development of the scheme of the whole more easily in view. The thunders of God's wrath, from first to last, are painted as the echoes of the cry of the martyrs. The seven churches had a mighty Avenger in Jehovah!

The seventh and last angel now sounded,[1] but instead of additional judgments on the heathen, John hears forth-

[1] Rev. xi. 15.

with, great voices in heaven celebrating the triumph of the Cross, and proclaiming that "The kingdom of the world" "is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever." The thought of such a glorious consummation, announced by the authority of the Eternal Himself, at once stirs the twenty-four elders, the representatives of redeemed humanity as a whole, to lowly adoration. Falling on their faces, they worship God in a grateful chant of thanksgiving and praise. "We give Thee thanks,"[1] they cry, "O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast"—they do not add, "and who art to come," because He had, in effect, already come;—"because Thou hast taken Thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations,"—the heathen, "were wroth,[2] and Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead (martyrs and confessors) to be judged (by being avenged on their adversaries), and the time to give their reward to Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints (the apostles, teachers, and brethren,)—and to them that fear Thy name, both small and great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth (by their wickedness)." So intimately is the whole book a record of the divine judgments to be poured out on the persecutor, and of the rewards to be bestowed on the faithful. The Apocalypse is, indeed, in great part, the fulfilling of the cry from under the throne.

As they thus adored, the vision widened, for the temple of God that is in heaven was opened, and the Ark of God's Covenant, lost since the destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Chaldeans, was seen—the pledge of the renewed and eternal union of God with His people. Israel, now penitent, was once more in God's favour, but the im-

[1] Rev. xi. 17. [2] Ps. ii. 1; xlvi. 6.

penitent heathen were to be finally destroyed. This renewal of the covenant was accompanied, as the first establishment of it at Sinai had been,[1] by lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail. The old economy, in all its details, was so sacred to John that he transfers it and them even to the heavens.

But the final judgments on the world were not to fall on it for yet a while. A new development of the visions would first be seen. A "great sign" reveals itself in heaven. A woman, the symbol, at first of the Virgin-Mother of our Lord; then of the Jewish, and finally of the Christian Church, was seen standing in the hollow of the silver sickle of the moon, clothed with light, and wearing a crown set with twelve stars, emblematic of the twelve tribes. She is about to bear a child, but there is danger near, for both her and her offspring. In all ages, the imagination has created its conceptions of monsters, from the most dreaded types of actual animal life, past or present. The crocodile, the huge lizard, the serpent, and the great creatures of the sea, are transformed by it into beings of gigantic size, deadly powers, and hideous aspect; the leviathan of the Hebrews, the dragon of the early dwellers in the Euphrates valley, and the dragons of the ancient and modern Western world. Ethiopia and India seem to have been credited as the special birth-place of these fabulous beings; the least-known lands being naturally chosen for this honour. Their length, in profane writings, varies from a hundred feet to eight miles, which, it is said, was that of one known to the Arabs. Sometimes they have wings, feet, and a mane; sometimes they are less highly endowed; great jaws, and

[1] Exod. xix. 18; Deut. iv. 11, 13.

a beard being however occasionally assigned them. They vary in colour; being fiery red, yellow, black, or ashen grey. Some are poisonous; they guard treasures in some cases, and at times have crowns on their head, but their dwelling-places are not suited to much display, being the depths of springs, deserts, and caves.

In the Chaldean mythology, the legends and myths of which were familiar to the Hebrews from the earliest times, as originally from Mesopotamia, a gigantic impersonation of Chaos and Darkness figures largely; Tiamat, which is associated, in the "Creation Tablets," with other mythical conceptions, poetically described as "the great serpent," "the great reptile," "the deadly beast," "the scorpion man," &c., and, as their leader and king, makes war against heaven. Merodach, the seer of the gods, undertakes, however, to "bind Tiamat,"[1] and for this end "made ready his bow, girt on his curved sword, hung his quiver at his side, and set the lightning before him, filling his body with its brightness." He also made a net to enclose the dragon of the abyss; seized the four winds that they might not issue forth,[2] and created three other winds—the evil, the storm, and the tempest winds, and let them loose on Tiamat, and then drove after him in his chariot, while Bel raised the deluge to aid him—"his mighty weapon, unsparing, overflowing, rapid." Tiamat and Merodach meet in battle[3] and Merodach overcomes "her and her host," binds Tiamat, throws his net over her allies, and binds and puts in prison the marshal of Tiamat's armies, with the other gods serving her. Then Bel smites the skull of Tiamat, and breaks her in two,

[1] See Rev. xx. 2. [2] See Rev. vii. 1.
[3] See Rev. xii. 7.

and of one half of her makes the covering of the sky.[1] The Sun-god has triumphed over the powers of darkness.

The Apocryphal book, Bel and the Dragon, which shows the current notions of New Testament times on such matters, tells us how Daniel killed the great dragon, or serpent, worshipped in Babylon; for such legends, like the Scriptural narrative of the Fall, had very early transferred to Satan the name of The Serpent.

Such ideas being everywhere familiar, we can readily understand how John, filled with an awful realisation of the deadly hatred of Satan, and through him, of the Roman world to Christ—should embody this horror in the image of "a great red dragon," in heaven; in keeping with the language of Job, which represents Satan as coming into the presence of God,[2] and with that of our Lord, when He tells the Seventy that He "beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven."[3] The red colour of this monster, usual in the myths of dragons, may hint either at his murderous fury, or at the imperial purple. Daniel had seen such hideous chimeras in his visions; one of which had ten horns, like that of John; but while another had four heads, that of John has seven.[4] The conception, therefore, though anticipated, is varied to meet the prophetic position; the ten horns now representing, perhaps, the ten proconsuls of the ten chief provinces of the empire—who were princes, in reality, while the seven heads are symbols, the Cæsars, up to Nero—Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and Galba. Or

[1] Sayce's "Higher Criticism," 62–72.

[2] Job i. 7. [3] Luke x. 18; John xii. 31; xvi. 11.

[4] Dan. vii. 6, 7; Rev. xii. 3.

the ten horns possibly indicate the ten actual or nominal emperors, by adding, after Galba, the names of Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, and Titus; these ten being represented by seven crowned heads; Galba, Otho, and Vitellius having failed to gain a firm seat on the throne, and thus being only as it were phantom rulers. But this second reading seems less simple than the first, and brings the series too far down from the period implied in the vision. Like Tiamat, the awful spectre is of enormous size; so huge that, as his long serpent-like tail lashed about in the heavens, it hurled the third part of the stars from their orbits and cast them to the earth; reminding us of the goat in Daniel's vision which "waxed great against the host of heaven, and cast down some of them, and of the stars, to the ground, and stamped on them."[1] His fury was presently, however, concentrated on the woman and her child—a son, whom we see to be the Messiah, from the application to Him of the words used of God's anointed, in the Psalms—as destined to "rule the (heathen) nations with a rod of iron."[2] To devour this child—that is, to stamp out Christianity—was the monster's supreme wish, but the child was "caught up to God," out of his reach, "and to God's throne."[3] The brethren need not fear. The heathen kings and rulers of the earth, and their people, had imagined a vain thing, in taking counsel against the Lord and against His Anointed. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision![4]

The figure is now changed to introduce the three great enemies of Christianity, specially dreaded in those times.[5]

[1] Dan. viii. 10. [2] Ps. ii. 9. [3] Rev. xii. 5. [4] Ps. ii. 2–4. [5] Rev. xii. 6.

The woman stands, henceforth, for the fugitive brethren at Pella, for "the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God." There she would be kept safe through the three years and a half which must pass before the catastrophe of the world arrived. But heaven itself was about to come directly, to the defence of the faith. Michael, "one of the chief princes" of heaven,[1] the guardian angel and champion of Israel,[2] whom Jewish legend had represented as contending with the devil, ages before, about the body of Moses,[3] now appears with his hosts; warring in heaven against the first and most terrible of the enemies of the infant Church —the dragon and his angels; as Merodach, the Sun-god, fought and overcame Tiamat and her associated powers of darkness, in the Chaldean myth. Battle raged in the skies, but "the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, and he was hurled down to the earth, and his angels with him."[4] Strange as it seems to us, Satan and his legions, were, in John's day, supposed free to enter the heavenly regions. Henceforth, however, neither he nor they would be permitted to approach God, as accusers of the brethren, any longer, as they had done till now,[5] for his "place" and that of his angels is not "found any more in heaven."[6] The persecutions of the past had been Satan's work, but now, he was at least kept from assailing them before God, and, at the worst, "his time was short."[7] But, "woe for the earth!" for his wrath was the more fierce from his defeat by Michael, and by his knowing that the Messiah was near, to chain and

[1] Dan. x. 13, 21; xii. 1. [2] Dan. xii. 1. [3] Jude 9. [4] Luke x. 18.
[5] Job i., ii.; 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22. [6] Rev. xii. 10. [7] Rev. xii. 12.

shut him up. Meanwhile, John hears the heavens rejoicing at his expulsion. "The salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, are come; since Satan is gone!" The redeemed who thus chanted the praises of God, had, they added, overcome Satan here on earth, in spite of his accusations above and persecutions below; the blood of the Lamb having given them the victory; that blood, the atoning worth of which they had confessed; faithfully witnessing for their faith even by enduring martyrdom for it.[1]

But if the saints in heaven were freed from all future alarm, those on earth were doomed to suffer grievously from the malignity of the dragon. To destroy the Church, symbolised by the woman, was now his great aim, but He who had of old borne His people as on eagle's wings from the perils of Egypt[2] now gave the persecuted woman the aid of the wings of "the great eagle"—possibly that which before had flown through the midst of heaven[3]—to bear her away safely into the place in the wilderness—that is, to Pella—where she would be kept from harm to the near approaching end. The three years and a half are in this case expressed,[4] in accordance with the old Hebrew form used in Daniel, as "a time, times, and half a time"[5]—or half the predicted period of the desecration of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes, which was to be 2300 days, that is, seven Jewish years;[6] and this half, or three and a half years, we further know, from an earlier verse,[7] was to be the duration of the "woman's" hiding safely at Pella.

But the dragon, that is, Satan, the Old Serpent, would

[1] Rev. xii. 10–12. [2] Exod. xix. 4. [3] Rev. viii. 13. [4] Rev. xii. 14.
[5] Dan. vii. 25; xii. 7. [6] Dan. viii. 14. [7] Rev. xii. 6.

not let her escape without a last outburst of malignity. As the invasion of Judah is compared by Isaiah to the inrush of a flood,[1] and as God is said by Hosea,[2] to be about to pour out His wrath against the princes of Judah like water, the dragon is seen, in the vision of John, to cast out from his mouth, a flood like a river; to sweep her away if possible. But the earth, which opened to swallow up Korah and his company,[3] opens now to swallow up this rushing stream; in other words, the fugitives at Pella would be protected from their enemies. Whether any particular incident in their story is thus metaphorically pictured, cannot now be known; but, very probably, it refers to the perils of their flight from Jerusalem. The dragon of Hebrew poetry, by the way, was supposed to be a water-monster "lying in the midst of the Nile canals," or "as a whale in the seas," so that John's introduction of a flood caused by the Evil One, as an emblem of his hostility to the Church, was natural to him as a Jew.[4] Satan's hate of the new faith was still, however, unappeased, so that he "went away to make war with the remnant of her seed," still in Jerusalem; as Paul calls it; "the mother of us all,"[5] and with the brethren everywhere, who "kept the commandments of God, and held the testimony of Jesus."[6]

But the second arch-enemy now rises in the vision.

The dragon had taken his position on the white sands near Cæsarea, the Roman capital and port of Palestine, and waits there for the arrival of the legions from the west; his instrument in the unholy war he is exciting against "the saints;" including in these the people of the

[1] Isa. lix. 19. [2] Hos. v. 10. [3] Num. xvi. 31, 32.
[4] Ezek. xxix. 3; xxxii. 2; Ps. lxxiv. 13. [5] Gal. iv. 26. [6] Rev. xii. 17.

Holy City, which they were coming to overwhelm.[1] Daniel had seen his four beasts come up from the sea, and Esdras had seen his eagle, also, coming up from it; this being the Hebrew way of intimating that they arrived from the west,[2] and, now, John sees a beast rising out of the waters. The eagle of Esdras had three heads, and one of the monsters in Daniel had four heads; but this frightful creature seen by John, had seven heads, and ten horns, like the fourth beast of Daniel. From the vision of the prophet moreover, the details of its appearance are more or less largely borrowed; the shape, as a whole, being like that of a leopard, its feet those of a bear, and its mouth that of a lion. This allegorical style is common to all the Apocalyptic literature, from its rise during the Babylonian Captivity to its disappearance, centuries after the Christian era; such many-headed and many-horned monsters being its recognised symbols of rulers and their chief subordinates. In this case, the ten horns were the ten provinces of the Roman Empire, whose proconsuls might well be thus pictured as wearing, each, a diadem, for they were, in reality, kings. The seven heads, in the same way, were the seven emperors, from Julius Cæsar; including Galba, then temporarily on the throne; for, like Daniel's beast, this one symbolised existing, or imminent, world-empire. This universal dominion is only, however, another form of that of the dragon, since it is through him that Rome has its power, and throne, and authority.[3] Incidentally, John notices that one of the seven heads, or emperors, had been wounded apparently to death, but that this deadly wound was subsequently healed; an allusion, beyond misconception, as shown by what

[1] Rev. xiii. 1. [2] Dan. vii. 3; 2 Esdras xi. 1. [3] Rev. xiii. 2.

follows, to the rumoured survival of Nero, after his supposed death.

This mystic Beast, John tells us, attracted all eyes, and fascinated them by its vague terrors, so that "all the world wondered after it," and in their slavish bewitchment "worshipped the dragon," that is Satan, from whom this monstrous creation had received its power and greatness: joining with him in this worship, the awful form of the Beast itself, his suffragan; the dread symbol of Imperial Rome. The spell that so bound mankind at large, so that it literally deified the irresistible power that dominated the world, is vividly painted by "the whole earth" at the sight of its emblem breaking into an anthem of servile adoration and crying, "Who is like the Beast? Who is able to make war with him?" The monster inspired by Satan, the dragon, answers back loud boasts of "great things" and hideous "blasphemies," but John comforts the churches by telling them, in accordance with the belief of the Christians and perhaps also of the Jews of that age, that his power would be ended in forty-two months—or three years and a half.[1] It was the conviction of the day that Rome must fall under the reign of a Cæsar, and when the seventh Cæsar had risen, by the return of Nero to life, his vengeance on her for her revolts from him would bring the time of her destruction. Three and a half years constantly recur as the duration of these closing events of the drama of the world. The two witnesses prophesy for that time; and it is that of the woman's stay in Pella: of the Gentiles treading the Holy City under foot, and of the duration of the authority of the Beast.[2] It is clearly, at most, a Hebrew expression for a very short period.

[1] Rev. xiii. 5. [2] Rev. xi. 1, 5; xii. 6; xiii. 5.

Rome, to the Christians and Jews, was a constant blasphemy against God, His name, His "Tabernacle" or Temple, whether on earth or in the heavens, and against all His servants here or above. The claim of Caligula to be hailed as a god while alive; his proclaiming his sister Drusilla a goddess; the ascription of divine honours to each emperor in succession, brought daily before Christian and Jew on inscriptions and coins; the erection of altars to the reigning emperor as Sebastos, or Augustus, and the burning incense to him as the embodiment of the deified omnipotence of Rome; even such a monster as Nero being thus worshipped; was a never-ceasing insult to Jehovah. The Jew and the Christian alike believed, as John expresses it, that it was Satan who had given the earth to Rome, as the great patron of idolatry: idols being regarded by both as devils. The grandeur, the pride, the majesty of the Roman Imperium, worshipped as the divine incarnation of success—that supposed proof, in all ages, of favour above—was maddening to the worshippers of the One God, and this worship of Rome and the Augustus of the day, was the great feature of the religion of the region of the seven churches.

To this instrument of the Prince of Darkness, power, John learned, it had been granted, to make war with the saints, and to overcome them—for Jerusalem, the city of the saints, was doomed to fall ere long into its hands. The world at large, moreover, was to lie under its shadow[1] and worship it: those only daring to refuse, whose names have been written from the foundation of the world, in the Lamb's book of life.[2]

Lest any of the brethren might be enticed to join

[1] Rev. xiii. 6, 7. [2] Rev. xvii. 8.

in the war against this arch-enemy, now beleaguering Jerusalem, every one willing to hear, is called on to listen to the seer. Captivity and death, he tells them, await those who embark in the struggle of the Zealots! The faith and patience of the saints are to be shown by their quietly bearing and waiting![1]

Another beast, the third great anti-Christian power, now reveals itself; coming up, in the vision, not out of the sea, but out of the earth; its head bearing two lamb's horns, though its words are those of a dragon.[2] Like the preceding monster, it was an instrument of the Old Serpent—the dragon—though its affecting the appearance of a lamb implied that it was not to work by violence. It was, in fact, an emblem of "the false prophet,"[3] of whom we shall hear more hereafter, or, in other words, of the misleading teachers and "sorcerers" who would seek to win over the brethren to idolatry or anti-Christian error, as the agents of the Roman authorities; leading men everywhere to worship the first Beast, that is, Rome; especially as represented by the emporor whose deadly wound was healed; a pointed anticipation of a second reign of Nero, after his return from concealment. The great aim of the false prophet is thus conceived to be, to promote the worship of Rome and of the Cæsars. To further this end, "great signs and wonders" would be exhibited by these deceivers, as had been predicted by Christ.[4] They would even make fire come down out of heaven,[5] as Caligula, in imitation of the lightnings of Jupiter, produced alarming counterfeits by his professors of magic arts.[6] Busts and statues would be made of the deified emperor,

[1] Rev. xiii. 9, 10. [2] Rev. xiii. 11 ff. [3] Rev. xvi. 13; xix. 20; xx. 10.
[4] Matt. xxiv. 24; Mark xiii. 22. [5] Rev. xiii. 13. [6] Cassius Dio. lxix. 28.

who "had been wounded by the sword, and came to life again," and to one of these the false prophet, like Pygmalion, would be enabled by the devil, his master, to give life, so that this "image of the Beast" could not only speak, but would command that all who did not worship him should be killed.[1] Speaking statues were well-known wonders of Roman superstition. Valerius Maximus,[2] for example, in a list of wonders believed to have occurred in Roman history, includes speaking statues; instancing that of Juno Moneta. The speaking image, in this case, is evidently a figurative allusion to the miracle by which the dead Nero had been restored to life; the Roman world largely believing that the gods had raised him, by special powers given to a "wonder-worker," while the Christians regarded it as a master-stroke of the dragon—that is, the devil. His insane demand that all men should worship him, is seen in his issuing an edict that "the small and great, rich and poor, the free and the slave, should be stamped with his mark —that is, with his name, or the symbolical numbers that stood for it—on their right hand, or on their forehead; and that no one should buy from any one on whom this was wanting, or sell to him:"[3] language which speaks of violent treatment of all who, like the Christians, refused to do homage to him, as a god. To avoid all contamination by this blasphemy was, however, very difficult, for the money in common use had on it the head of Rome, or of a god, or of the emperor as divine, and thus was, in itself, a daily trouble to the brethren; making them shrink from using it more than was absolutely necessary.

[1] Rev. xiii. 15. [2] Val. Max. i. 8.
[3] Rev. xiii. 16, 17.

The class of readers for whom John was writing, and his own strongly-Jewish feelings, is strikingly shown, in reference to this delicate subject, in which concealment was absolutely required,—by his use of the current rabbinical "wisdom," that is, the science of numbers known among the rabbis as Gematria: a branch of the Kabbalah, or secret science of the scribes. It had been brought from Babylonia at the return from exile, and had been gradually developed till each letter of Scripture stood for a number; the aggregate letters of any name or fact being held to reveal secret mysteries through the numbers thus represented; while, on the other hand, mysteries could be formulated by numbers, so as to be understood by the initiated. This system was boldly declared to have been devised by Jehovah Himself; His secret meaning having, it was said, been hidden by Him in words from which it was to be disclosed, by substituting for these words, others of the same numerical value. Thus, to escape the idea of Moses having married an Ethiopian, the letters of the word Cushith[1] were added together, as numbers, and the figures were thus obtained which stand for "fair of countenance."[2] On the other hand, in the Epistle of Barnabas, the Jewish Christian who wrote it finds, that the number (318) of Abraham's servants conceals the name of Jesus, and the figure of the Cross,—iota standing for 10, η for 8, making IH, the symbol of Jesus, while the τ represents the Cross. One Christian sect, a little later, saw a proof that the Logos was united to Jesus at His baptism, from the fact that the numerical value of the letters of "peristera," the word for "dove," was the same as that of the two letters alpha

[1] כושית. [2] יפת מכאה.

and omega; the name given by Christ to Himself in the Apocalypse.

Having just spoken of the "number of the name" of the first Beast, John calls attention to it, in accordance with this mystical science; telling us that it is based on "wisdom," that is, on the rabbinical "Gematria," and proceeds to name the abhorred personage indicated by the "Beast"—giving the numbers which will disclose it, when the letters for which they stand are remembered. He who understands this cabalistic "wisdom" is to "count the number of the beast," that is, to change it into its equivalent letters, "for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred and sixty and six."

When, however, we act on this, and add together the numerical value of the letters of the name of Nero, as this secret "wisdom" wrote it, in Hebrew, in those days, נרון קסר—which is a transcription of the Greek form *Νέρων Καῖσαρ*, we get the number 666, and Neron Kesar —as spelt in the Hebrew letters—was, we may assume, the name by which the Christians of "Asia" knew the emperor; for the local coins bear the equivalent Greek words. Among the brethren in the seven churches, the meaning of John's cipher would therefore be instantly clear; even the heathen-born among them, in those days, being acquainted with this secret science, as we see from its being a special favourite with the Gnostics, a little later.[1]

As God, then, has His Christ, Satan has his Antichrist, and this is to be a Cæsar, Nero, the head wounded to death, but not killed—Nero, believed then, by the masses,

[1] נ = 50; ר = 200; ו = 6; ק = 50; ס = 100; ס = 60; ר = 200, in all = 666.

including the Christians, to be still alive; restored to life, in fact, by miracle, through the power of the dragon, that is, the devil. "The Beast that thou sawest was and is not; and is about to come up (again) out of the abyss (that is, hell) and (then, shortly) to go into perdition" was rightly felt by John and the brethren to be Antichrist.[1]

In the returning Nero he and they saw the "exceeding dreadful" beast of Daniel's vision, who made war with the saints, and prevailed against them[2]—the Man of Sin—who should rule till the Ancient of Days,—the Messiah—came, and judgment was given by Him in favour of the saints. As the rabbis had seen the Antichrist in Caligula, the Christians, since the horrors of 64, had seen him in Nero. St. Paul had told the churches that the last great foe would be revealed setting himself forth as God,[3] but who else could that "man of sin, and son of perdition" be, but the bloody persecutor of the brethren, the incarnation of all wickedness, the murderer of a brother, a mother, and of a wife; the incendiary of Rome, the emperor of the mob, the son of the abyss, whom even hell could not hold back from reappearing, to curse earth?

The Restored-from-Hades is brought forward as in himself, a beast, though presently represented, once more, as only one head of the earlier Beast — the Roman Empire: the great dragon, Satan, being the virtual creator and the living power in all these monsters alike; for it is, as we have seen, the devil who gives Antichrist, the wounded but revived Cæsar,

[1] Rev. xvii. 8. This pointed to the Cæsars. [2] Dan. vii. 20.
[3] 2 Thess. ii. 3 ff.

all his throne and his power, for the forty-two months he is to hold it.

The false prophet, the accepted ally of the Antichrist, Nero, looking like a lamb, but with the voice and malignant spirit of a dragon—was ready-to-hand in the mob of "mathematicians," dealing, like the rabbis, in the mystical powers of numbers, and of astrologers, soothsayers, sorcerers, and pretenders to hidden knowledge and miracle-working, who thronged the Court, and abounded in every great city of the empire. It was felt certain by the Christians that on his reappearance, Nero, like Caligula, would set up his statue to receive divine worship, and that the falling away of the weak and false among them, would be shown in their bowing the knee to it; as that of the men of an earlier time had been shown by their bowing before the Syrian altars,—the abomination of desolation,—set up in the holy place. John, as we have seen, felt thus, and St. Paul had written, fifteen years before, to the Thessalonians: "Let no man beguile you in any wise, for the day of the Lord will not come till after the falling away, and the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; sitting in the Temple of God, and setting himself forth as God." The earlier coming of "the lawless one"—the Antichrist—that is, Nero, would, he added, be accompanied with "all power and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness, through the working of Satan;"[1] a description of John's false prophet which reminds us of the pretended miracles wrought according to Josephus, by Eleazar, the son of Simon.[2]

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 3–10. [2] *Bell. Jud.* ii. 20, 2.

The final struggle has now come. The Dragon; the First Beast,[1] or Antichrist; and the Second Beast, or false prophet, the symbol of the reign of Satanic deceit, through thaumaturgists and archimagos of all colours: three awful enemies of Christ and the Church, were at hand, and had been shown, in vision, to the long-enduring saints!

[1] See Geikie's "Hours with the Bible:" The Gospels, 202.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KINGDOM OF THE LAMB, AND THE OPENING JUDGMENT

THE dreadful spectacle of the three huge chimeras, to whose violence or craft the weak fold of Christ would be exposed, in the last struggle of the powers of darkness to overwhelm it, must have weighed down the heart of the lonely seer at Patmos, far from his "companions in tribulation." But, as that island lay like a dream of rest amidst the waters round it, a glimpse of peace and joy now opened in the vision, revealing the calm and eternal security and bliss, that would hereafter reward all who showed, to the end, their devotion to Christ, by their zealous fidelity and loving observance of all Christian graces. Mount Zion[1]—originally as bare and coldly uninviting as the other hills around, but now unspeakably dear to the Jew from immemorial religious associations,—seemed to rise before him, transferred by the strange magic of a dream, to the upper world. On its sacred height stood the Lamb who, only a short while before, had opened the roll inscribed with the destinies of the Church and of mankind, but sealed to all except Him, and with Him appeared a hundred and forty-four thousand, on whose foreheads was seen the name of the heavenly Father. These, John perceived, were not the same as the similar number thus marked in a former vision, but a special multitude "purchased from among men, to be

[1] Rev. xiv. 1–5.

the first-fruits to God and the Lamb," and thus an earnest of the infinitely greater multitude which the harvest of the world would in due season yield. As such, they had showed in their graces while alive, what John, as a strict Jewish-Christian, regarded as the special marks of high devotion to his Master. They had been wholly given to His service, abstaining from all family entanglements; in keeping with the Levitical law which looked on these as more or less, an impurity.[1] In such a view of marriage, he differed from Paul or his school, for the author of the Hebrews had pronounced "marriage to be honourable in all respects,"[2] and Paul himself had only qualified this by showing that a single life was best for the evil times through which the Church was then passing, and because the time "was short," before all earthly interests would be ended by the coming of Christ; leaving but a passing interval in which married life could be enjoyed, and demanding complete and undivided dedication to the service of the Master, since so much was to be done, in so brief a space, to prepare the world for His Advent.[3] While writing thus, however, to the Corinthians, he shows how far he was from casting any slur on marriage, by his recognition and approval of it, at the close of his life, even in "bishops" and "deacons";[4] as, indeed, was fitting, since Christ Himself chose married men, among others, as apostles.[5] But the hundred and forty-four thousand were, besides, notable as having kept themselves from all untruthfulness; a virtue so wide that they were "without blemish;" as

[1] Lev. xv. 18; 1 Cor. vii. 28–33; 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[2] Heb. xiii. 4.
[3] 1 Cor. vii. 26, 28–32.
[4] 1 Tim. iii. 2, 12; Titus i. 6.
[5] 1 Cor. ix. 5; Matt. viii. 14.

was said of the offerings which alone found acceptance before God in the earthly Temple.

As John gazed at this celestial vision, there now rose from the shining throng, a sound grand "as the voice of many waters," so familiar to him from that of the waves never silent round him. Swelling at times into a volume like "the voice of a great thunder," as when the ocean was swept by a storm, it presently sank to a strain so gentle that it seemed the music of innumerable harps, and to this divine accompaniment rose a chant new to him, from before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the crowned elders—all nature and the universal Church thus taking part in it. But what the words were, he did not catch, for only the hundred and forty-four thousand of the redeemed, whom he now saw, could learn it; no others having the experience which it embodied, and which gave it birth. But he was told that these "first-fruits" of redemption were privileged to follow the Lamb whithersoever He went; the fitting reward of that entire fidelity which had followed Him here on earth, even through shame, or suffering, or death, and had made them the types of perfect devotion and love.

If, however, the Churches were to be comforted with this disclosure of the special glory awaiting those who, in such times, practised the self-denial of a single life, to work the more wholly for their Lord, they were still further shown, by fresh visions of the judgments, impending on all who worshipped the Beast, and persecuted the Church, how profoundly their sufferings at the hand of their enemies, engaged the sympathies of Heaven, visions which would strengthen their patience,[1] by ful-

[1] Rev. xiv. 12.

filling the cry of the souls of the martyrs from below the heavenly altar, that God would "avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth."[1] Yet mercy, even now delays, for the time, the stroke of justice.[2] A great angel not previously seen, appeared flying in mid heaven, having an eternal Gospel to proclaim to these very dwellers upon earth, giving them still a chance of escape. Every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people, was forthwith called upon by him, with a great voice which sounded over the world, to fear God and give Him, —not the Beast,—glory; because the hour of judgment was come; and to worship Him that made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters,— not vain idols.

An interval for the acceptance or refusal of this appeal must be assumed, but, since it fell on deaf ears and hopelessly impenitent hearts, a second angel in due time, appeared, proclaiming in advance, the destruction of Rome, the seat of Anti-Christian power, as if already accomplished, though still, as we shall see, in the future. Lifting up his mighty voice, he filled the heavens with the cry—"Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great"—that is, Rome—"which has made all the nations drink the wine of her fornication,—that is, has corrupted the whole world with her idolatry; especially that of the worship of the imperial power, symbolised by the Beast.

A third angel followed, crying, like those before with a world-filling voice, that any man worshipping the Beast and his image—doing homage to the statue of the emperor, and receiving "a mark on his forehead or in his hand," would drink the wine of God's wrath, pre-

[1] Rev. vi. 10. [2] Rev. xvi. 6–8.

pared, "unmixed,"—that is, undiluted—"in the cup of His indignation;" words which remind us of the familiarity of John and the Christians generally, with the Old Testament, for a Psalmist had used the same figure, long ages before, telling us that "in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup, and the wine foams; it is full of mixture (to make it more powerful), and He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain out even all its dregs, and drink them."[1] Wine was drunk either with or without water, or with or without added drugs. Isaiah had said that Jerusalem had drunk, at the hand of Jehovah, the cup of His fury, and drained it,[2]—and Jeremiah, also, had adopted the metaphor, in connection with the nations at large.[3] This the angel announces, to signify that the enemies of God will be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; the smoke of their torment ascending for ever and ever, so that they have no rest day nor night.[4]

The dangers to which the brethren were daily exposed, often threatening even death, called for "strong consolation" and support, and this was now sweetly given them, in words consecrated, ever since, to the comfort of mourners and sufferers.[5] A voice, we know not whose, was heard by the seer, calling to him from heaven, to write—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth"—that is, from the moment of their dying—"Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them."

The overshadowing wings of heavenly love once more close, after this interval of pity and tenderness, and

[1] Ps. lxxv. 8. [2] Isa. li. 17. [3] Jer. xxv. 15.
[4] Rev. xiv. 11. [5] Rev. xiv. 12, 13.

cloudy visions of the near approaching judgments recommence.

A white cloud sailed into the sky, and, on it, John saw one like the Son of man sitting, wearing a golden crown, and having a sickle in His hand; the Lamb, in fact, now appearing as the Judge, not the Saviour of mankind. Presently, an angel of the presence comes out from the heavenly Temple, the seat of God; crying with a great voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Send forth Thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is more than ripe." The sickle was forthwith cast upon the earth and the earth was reaped.[1]

A second angel now came out of the Temple, also bearing a sharp sickle; a third angel, who "has power over fire" appearing at the same time, from the altar that stood before the temple. This fire angel now calls to him who had the sickle, to gather the clusters of the vine with his sickle—the wine harvest coming later than that of grain, which had already been reaped. The grapes, it was said, were now fully ripe. Therewith, this sickle also was cast on the earth, and the vintage was thrown into the great winepress of the wrath of God, which is represented as being outside the city, Jerusalem. There, it was now trodden, and out of it came the juice of the vine, in blood, which rose in a stream as high as the bridles of horses; stretching, at that depth, over a distance of sixteen hundred furlongs, or about two hundred miles. It thus covered more than the whole surface of Palestine, which was reckoned 1664 stadia, or furlongs, from Tyre to Egypt; Jerome indeed giving the length of the country as only 1280 furlongs. The land was, therefore,

[1] Rev. xiv. 14–16.

turned into a sea of blood, from the extreme north, to the Red Sea, at Suez.[1] This figure of the Judgment as the treading of a vintage, is not infrequent in the Old Testament. Joel speaks of the "press being full, and the vats overflowing, with the wickedness of the heathen."[2] Jehovah says, in Isaiah,[3] "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me;" and Jeremiah says, "The Lord has trodden as in a winepress, the virgin daughter of Judah;" alluding to the overthrow by the Chaldeans.[4] Jerusalem, moreover, is the scene of the final decisive "day of the Lord," in Joel; the valley of Jehoshaphat, under the city walls, being that of its decision.[5] Zechariah, also, makes the day of the Lord have its scene at the Holy City;[6] and the king of the north is, in Daniel, to pitch his tents between the sea and the holy mountain.[7] The same localisation of the last struggle between Jehovah and His enemies, is found, also, in the Apocryphal books current in John's day;[8] the horses being said, in the Book of Enoch, to wade up to the breast in the blood of sinners, in the day of the Lord.[9] John thus uses imagery familiar, in the same connection, to his readers, and shows us, also, how the writings of earlier days had supplied him with part of the drapery of his visions.

It thus seems to have been expected that, as in the visions of the Day of the Lord in the Prophets, Jerusalem was to be the scene of, at least, one act in the great closing world-drama. The advancing steps of this were now being shadowed out to the churches by the seer, in the imagery

[1] Holtzmann, iv. 346. [2] Joel iii. 13. [3] Isa. lxiii. 3.
[4] Lam. i. 15. [5] Joel iii. 12. [6] Zech. xiv. 1–4. [7] Dan. xi. 45.
[8] 2 Esdras xiii. 35. [9] Enoch c. 3.

they loved; colossal as the phantoms supposed, in those days and long after, to show themselves sometimes, in the heavens; cloud-armies, with long array of banners, monstrous forms of dragons and other terrors, and wheeling squadrons, and the walls of domed and castled cities, with the onrush of opposing hosts of gigantic warriors, making nations hold their breath in pale terror. John could not, as we have seen,[1] conceive that the Temple itself could perish, though the "nations" would be allowed to tread its outer court and the Holy City, under foot, for three years and a half. But that period, as has been told, was to limit their temporary triumph; for, at its close, the penitence of the multitude, after the preaching and martyrdom of the witnesses, would bring God back again to the midst of His chosen people, and then, if I may put in His mouth the words of Joel, which He had in part already adopted,[2] "Jehovah would roar" out the battle cry "from Zion, and utter His voice" as the leader of His hosts "from Jerusalem," and rush down on the beleaguering foe; trampling them, in turn, under foot, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, till their blood rose, as we have heard, "breast deep" over Palestine, from Lebanon to the Red Sea. The annihilation of the Roman army then besieging Jerusalem, and the deliverance of Zion from all its foes, as the prophet had foretold,[3] was thus to be the first step in the judgment on the dragon and the Beast.

But the fiery waves of judgment are rising apace! The last act rises before the seer, foreshadowed by a "great and marvellous sign;" seven angels appearing in the vision, bearing the seven last plagues,

[1] Rev. xi. 1. [2] Joel iii. 16. [3] Joel iii. 17 ff.

"finishing the wrath of God" on the enemies of the churches.[1]

A brief pause, however, intervenes, before these terrors are launched forth on mankind; the victors in the awful conflict at Jerusalem just described, who survive the freeing it from its foes, chanting their song of triumph, before the throne of God, in the solemn interval. They had "come victorious from" the battle with "the Beast," and from their refusal to worship "his image," or to wear "the number of his name,"[2] and now stood on the glass-like sea, glowing in fiery splendour in the light of the throne: a token of love to the faithful servants of God, and of wrath against their enemies. In their hands were "harps of God," and anon they raised a mighty chant, which John recognised as combining the thanksgiving ode sung by "Moses, the servant of God," and the ancient Israel, for their deliverance at the Red Sea, from the hosts of Pharaoh,[3] and the song in which the corresponding redemption of his saints by the Lamb, from the power of sin and death, was celebrated in the heavenly regions; perhaps that which John had already heard sung by the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of the angels, and echoed by all creation.[4] But to these they added words of their own—"Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, thou king of the nations.[5] Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy righteous acts have been made manifest." The exaltation of Jehovah for the destruction of the

[1] Rev. xv. 1. [2] Rev. xv. 2 ff. [3] Exod. xv. 1–17.
[4] Rev. v. 11–14. [5] Zech. xiv. 9.

hosts of Egypt, now rose even more grandly, for that of the hosts of Rome beleaguering the Holy City, Jerusalem.

This magnificent spectacle having faded away, the field of vision was occupied by one still more overpowering.[1] As once before,[2] the heavenly Temple — the archetype after which the Tabernacle of Witness[3] had been modelled in the wilderness[4] — was thrown open, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues, came out of it, arrayed in snowy, shining, linen robes, like priests, and girt round their breasts with golden girdles.[5] To these "one of the four living creatures gave seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever;" the Temple meanwhile filling with "smoke from the glory of God," then in it, and "from His power," as in the vision of Isaiah.[6] And as at "Mount Sinai," when it "was altogether on smoke, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it ascended as the smoke of a furnace," the multitudes shrank back and stood afar off,[7]—none of the celestials "were able to enter the temple," till this awful manifestation had disappeared, when "the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."

A great voice, we know not whose, now sounded out of the temple, commanding these angels, to "go and pour the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth;" the judge remaining unapproachable till his wrath was accomplished."[8]

The pouring out of the first bowl followed, and forthwith, there broke out "a noisome and grievous sore," like the boils and blains of the Egyptian plague,[9] "on the men

[1] Rev. xv. 5 ff. [2] Rev. xi. 19. [3] Num. xvii. 7, 8. [4] Heb. viii. 5. [5] Rev. xv. 5 ff. See parallels, Rev. i. 13; iv. 4; vii. 9, 13; xvii. 4; xviii. 16; xix. 8, 14.
[6] Isa. vi. 4. [7] Exod. xix. 18. [8] Rev. xvi. 1. [9] Exod. ix. 9.

who had the mark of the Beast and worshipped his image."[1] The second bowl was next poured into the sea, and it turned to blood, like the curdled blood of a dead man, and every living creature in the waters presently died. In an earlier scene of the visions,[2] the same judgment had fallen on a third part of the sea, but now the whole ocean was smitten with God's wrath; the judgment recalling the milder but terrible visitation of Egypt, at the word of Moses, when the river Nile and its canals became blood, and the fish necessarily died.[3]

The third bowl fell on the rivers and springs, of which only a third had been smitten in the former curse;[4] all the waters now becoming blood, like the sea. A fire angel had appeared in an earlier scene,[5] "but now the angel of the waters" thus polluted, is seen—his office reminding us of the angel of Jewish legend in a passage omitted in the Revised Version,[6] who troubled the waters of Bethesda, to give them healing power. This Guardian of the waters of the earth, is heard glorifying the avenging justice of God, which has thus been carried out. "Righteous," cries he, "art Thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because Thou didst thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast Thou given them to drink. They deserve it." Then, from the altar—perhaps from the souls of the martyrs under it, who had clamoured to be avenged for their martyrdom, and felt that their prayer was answered,—came a voice—"Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments."[7] The churches from whose members these martyrs were to be slain in the persecutions yet to break

[1] Rev. xvi. 2. [2] Rev. viii. 8, 9. [3] Exod. vii. 17–21. [4] Rev. viii. 8–11
[5] Rev. xiv. 18. [6] John v. 4. [7] Rev. xvi. 7.

out—for the "souls" who prayed for vengeance were not only those of martyrs who had already perished, but of the far greater number who were to seal their faith with their blood, in the struggle against the Beast and his image —were thus encouraged to "overcome," by the certainty that their death would be bitterly atoned by their enemies.

The sun next felt the wrath of the Eternal; the fourth bowl, poured upon it, kindling its flames till they "scorched men as with fire."[1] But terrible as was the agony, there was no repentance for the sins that brought such a visitation, but only blasphemous fury against the God who launched these plagues on men. Judgment was now hastening to its full vengeance. The bodies of men, the waters and living creatures of the sea, the rivers and springs, and, even the beneficent sun, had been smitten with a curse, to punish a world which had turned to the worship of the Beast and his image, and persecuted all who remained faithful to God and His Christ. But now the hand of God reaches even to the throne of the Beast—to Rome—the seat of the Roman power—the great instrument of Satan in his war against heaven. Darkness was poured out on the seven-hilled city, but though "they gnawed their tongues for pain," which they might well do, with their foul bodily sores, and blood for drink, they only the more "blasphemed the God of heaven for all their pains and their sores, and felt no penitence for their works."[2]

The sixth bowl of wrath was poured out upon the Euphrates, drying up its great stream, impossible to be crossed otherwise, "that the way might be made ready for the kings coming from the sunrising" as the way was made ready for Joshua through the dried-up bed of the

[1] Rev. xvi. 8, 9. [2] Rev. xvi. 10, 11.

Jordan. These kings, we are told, were to take part in the "war of the great day of God"—"the war against the Lamb."[1] The Parthians for two generations before John, and till the days of Trajan, as I have said, the terror of the Eastern Empire, are conceived, by John, as crossing the great river, not, now, apparently, as the supporters of the revived Nero, but as part of the huge army stirred up by the dragon, to war against God and His Christ. It was from the Euphrates that the innumerable army of horsemen, on horses with manes like lions, and nostrils breathing fire, had swept on to kill the third part of man,[2] and now, after perhaps restoring Nero to his throne, they were to join in the final struggle between light and darkness; God and the Pit.

But these Trans-Euphrates kings would not have come, it seems, of their own motion. Three unclean spirits or devils, like frogs, seemed to come out of the mouth of Satan the dragon, Nero the Beast, and the False Prophet respectively; the false prophet indicating either some unknown mystagogue patronised by Nero: perhaps Simon Magus, whom legend connects with him, or Balbillus of Ephesus, each reputed in that day as miracle-workers, or perhaps the whole body of "magicians, soothsayers, dream-interpreters," mathematicians, and the like, whose wiles were so fatal to many weak-minded Christians. These frog-like spirits of the Pit had great influence by their "signs," one leading form of which was the cure of those possessed of devils, of which we have an example, to which I have often referred, recorded by Josephus, as performed by one

[1] Rev. xvi. 12; xvii. 14; xix. 19; xx. 8.
[2] Rev. ix. 14–19.

Eleazar, a Jew, before Vespasian. I have quoted the story elsewhere, but may perhaps advantageously do so again—as illustrating vividly the agencies by which men were, in those ages, won to believe in any extravagance. "He put a ring which had under the seal on it, a root of one of the kinds mentioned by Solomon, to the nostrils of the demoniac, and then drew out the devil through his nostrils, as he smelt it. And when the man fell down immediately, he adjured the devil to return into him no more, still making use of the name of Solomon, and repeating the incantations left by him. Anxious, moreover, to convince the spectators that he had the power he claimed, he set a cup of water a little way off, and commanded the devil, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, which was presently done."[1] The three spirits emanating from the three great anti-Christian adversaries, had for their errand, we are told, to "go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty."[2] Such a danger from infernal enemies would inevitably alarm the brethren beyond measure, excited so intensely as they already were, by the expectation of the imminent descent of their Lord from heaven, to the final judgment of mankind. The narrative, therefore, is fittingly interrupted at this point, by the appearance or voice of Jesus Himself, delivering a solemn warning, and giving a supporting promise to the faithful. "Behold," says He, in words repeated by Him, in part, long before, when He was on earth, and, in part, to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea,[3] "I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and

[1] Jos. *Antiq.* viii. 2, 5. [2] Rev. xvi. 14.
[3] Matt. xxiv. 43. See also 1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 10; Rev. iii. 3.

keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."[1]

The seducing spirits would finally gather the kings of all the earth to a place "called in Hebrew, Har Magedon;" an allusion, it would seem, to "Megiddon" or Megiddo, a fortress on the slopes of the Carmel range, facing Jezreel, and known, later, as the Roman station of Legio, the present Ledjun. John calls it "the hill"—Har—of Magedon, which suits its actual site. The broad plain or 'valley" of Esdraelon, which it overlooked, was the scene of the great victory of Barak over Sisera, but also of the defeat and death of Josiah by Pharaoh Necho; a calamity so terrible to Judah that it was lamented in songs, as late as to the Persian domination,[2] and that the Prophet Zechariah names it as the darkest embodiment of national suffering.[3] But we must remember that we are reading a book of visions, not of history, and need not dream of reducing to plain narrative a series of grand prophetic pictures, intended only as symbols of God's purposes; not minute anticipations of their details. Ingenuity, however, is tempted in such matters; Ewald, for example, thinking that Rome is indicated; the Hebrew letters of Har Megeddon being equivalent, in arithmetical value, to Roma ha Gedolah—"the great Rome."

The last scene in the passing vision, now rises before the seer, as the seventh angel pours out his bowl of divine wrath on the air. Forthwith came a great voice from the throne of God in the heavenly temple, saying, "What was commanded is done;" words implying that the actual close of history had come, and that no more

[1] Rev. iii. 4, 18. [2] 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. [3] Zech. xii. 11.

interruptions to the final catastrophe were to intervene. Lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake greater than had ever been since creation, shook the heavens and the solid globe.[1] Only the tenth part of Jerusalem had been thrown down by the convulsion beneath it,[2] but now "the great city," which, apparently, is Rome, was shattered into three parts, and the cities of the heathen were thrown down, and Rome—the great Babylon,—had to drink to the dregs, "the cup of the fierceness of the wrath of God." As in a former scene of the visions, moreover,[3] "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." To add to all, great hail fell, to which that of the Egyptian plague was insignificant,[4] for each hailstone weighed a talent,—the weight given by Josephus as that of the huge stones hurled by the Roman engines against Jerusalem—the talent weighing about half a hundredweight.[5] But no penitence followed; men only blasphemed God for sending such a plague. The earth was, assuredly, ripe for judgment.

[1] Rev. xvi. 17 ff. [2] Rev. xi. 13. [3] Rev. vi. 14. [4] Exod. ix. 22 ff.
[5] Some balistæ threw stones of even three hundredweight. Dictionary of Antiquities, art. *Tormentum*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FALL OF "BABYLON THE GREAT"

SOME time after, we know not how long, another scene in the great world-drama unrolled itself before the seer, in a new vision. An invitation of one of the seven avenging angels, called him to come and see the judgment of "the great harlot," that is, the city of Rome, the centre of the Antichristian world-dominion.[1] To seduce men to the worship of idols was habitually compared by the Hebrew writers to unchastity; the bond between God and man being thought of as a marriage in which "our Maker was our husband,"[2] and Rome had been the great corrupter of the nations, in spreading among them, the most debasing form of heathenism, in the worship of the Cæsars, and of the Imperial Power which they personified. Accepted widely through the empire, and with special fervour in John's own province of "Asia," it had made the nations, at large, worshippers of the Beast, that is, in reality, of the devil, of whom Rome, in the opinion of the Christians, was only an agent in his war against their Lord. The distinctive characteristics of the guilt of the "great city" would now be told, as they appeared in the sight of God. Like Babylon on the Euphrates, amidst its many canals, Rome, the spiritual Babylon, the seducer of the nations, could be described, at least by poetical

[1] Rev. xvii. 1 ff. [2] Isa. liv. 5; Jer. iii. 14.

license, to enforce the parallel, as sitting on many waters,[1] though the Tiber was her one actual river; the visionary picture being intended, as the angel presently explains, to represent "the many peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues," over which the imperial city ruled.[2] As Nahum had said of Nineveh, the sister city of Babylon,[3] that, by the multitude of her unchaste seductions to idolatry, she, like "a well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts," that is, of Satanic temptations, had "sold nations through her lewdness, and families through her witchcrafts," to turn them from God to idols and wickedness, Rome had corrupted mankind. Her awful power had been employed to spread and multiply the abominations of idolatry, to lead "the kings of the earth" to worship the Beast—Rome, personified by the reigning Cæsar—and to make all the nations[4] "drink the wine of her uncleanness, that kindled the wrath of God," and had thus seduced "all the world" to show this defiance of Jehovah, as if drunken and deprived of their senses.

But now, the seer feels as if carried away, in his trance, to a wilderness, and there he sees a woman sitting on a beast arrayed in scarlet-coloured trappings, covered with blasphemous titles; this monster having seven heads and ten horns. It is the Beast that had come out of the sea at Cæsarea, in Palestine,[5] though the diadems on its ten horns are omitted, and the blasphemous titles are written all over its trappings, not on the seven horns only, and is the Antichrist, Nero, or if we prefer it, the imperial dignity. Its scarlet housings make us think of the wealth, the power, and the insane pride of the Roman

[1] Jer. li. 13. [2] Rev. xvii. 15. [3] Nah. iii. 4.
[4] Rev. xiv. 8. [5] Rev. xiii. 1.

emperors, and of Rome itself, but also of the colour of the Roman soldier's cloak; as if hinting at the legions under the Beast's command,[1] but perhaps, also, at the blood of the saints shed by the imperial demon.[2] On this dreadful form sat a woman clothed in purple and scarlet; emblems at once of splendour and blood-thirstiness. One is reminded of the imagery used by Ezekiel of the King of Tyre,[3] in the magnificence of this personification of the great city; for she was decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls.[4] In her hand she carried, like the older Babylon, in the vision of Jeremiah,[5] a golden cup, full of idolatrous abominations; the emblem of her foul morality and spiritual corruption. On the band which, like high Roman ladies, she wore across her forehead, she had, moreover, her name written, as the Roman harlots were wont to have theirs over their cells,[6]—this name being a "mystery," to be understood only in the secret gatherings of the brethren—BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. Looking closely at her, John saw that she was drunk, not with wine, but with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus Christ—a vivid allusion as it must have seemed, in the circles of the survivors, to the horrors of Nero's slaughter of Christians in 64, and to the subsequent persecutions throughout the empire, in one of which Antipas had perished.

Astonished at the sight of such a terrific apparition, John tells us he wondered greatly, but the angel presently condescended to explain its weighty significance.[7]

[1] Rev. xviii. 12, 16; Matt. xxviii. 28. [2] Rev. xvii. 6.
[3] Ezek. xxviii. 13. [4] Rev. xviii. 16. [5] Jer. li. 7.
[6] Juv. vi. 123. [7] Rev. xvii. 7–18.

The Beast, he said, was he who had been, but for the time was not, but was about to come up again out of the abyss—the dark realms of Satan, beneath the earth—though only for a short time; after which he was to return to final perdition. This can apply to no one else but Nero, the head wounded, as was thought fatally, but nevertheless healed—believed dead, but now, restored to life again, and confidently expected back among men, to sit on the throne once more. That he should in this ghost-like way reappear from the abyss, was in keeping with the ascending from it of the locusts and the horsemen of a former scene.[1] "All men," the angel added,[2] "except those written from the foundation of the world in the book of life, would wonder when they saw the Beast" come again; thinking how he had disappeared from amidst such power and glory, and now, once more, was in the flesh, among the living. But to understand such a mystery, was possible only to those who had skill in "wisdom."

"The seven heads," he continued, "had a double meaning; representing at once the seven hills on which Rome sits, and also, the seven kings, or emperors"[3]—of whom Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero were dead, while Galba was reigning for the moment, but would presently fall. "The other," he goes on to say, "is not yet come," but he points out unmistakably whom he was, by saying that he was "the Beast, that was, and is not, but was himself also an eighth," though, already, he had been one "of the seven" heads, and then after his temporary restoration would "go into perdition." That the seven heads are called kings[4] is in accordance with the language of SS. Peter and Paul, who both call

[1] Rev. ix. 1 ff. [2] Rev. xvii. 8. [3] Rev. xvii. 9 ff. [4] Rev. xvii. 10 ff.

the emperors "kings,"[1] and that the ten horns are also called kings was natural, as they were kings in fact, though not in name. As proconsuls or imperial legates, of the ten chief, or senatorial provinces, they were, further, in the belief of the churches, destined to be kings at the breaking up of the empire, though as yet they were not thus styled, but were only horns, not heads; receiving, however, kingly authority from the Beast, to rule along with him for a brief hour.[2] They would be faithful to him, that is, to the restored Nero, and as fiercely against the Christians; "making war against the Lamb." But as King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lamb would overcome them, at the head of His "called and chosen and faithful ones."[3]

Reverting, now, to the first part of the vision, the angel went on to say that the waters by which John had seen the woman sitting, were the many nations subject to Rome. But Nero, the Beast, supported by his proconsuls, furious at the great city for having driven him from her, and made him suffer so greatly, would in his fierce vengeance "make her—the harlot—desolate and naked, and would eat her flesh, and would burn her utterly with fire." God had put it into their hearts to do this, and thus carry out His "mind," and had moved them to common action and one aim, that they might agree to give back the kingdom, that is, the empire, to the Beast, instead of seeking it for themselves, or fighting against him; his rule continuing till the words of God, as revealed to John, were accomplished.[4] Then follows the express statement that the woman is the great city, that reigns over the kings of the earth.[5]

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 13, 17; 1 Tim. ii. 2. [2] Rev. xvii. 12. [3] Rev. xvii. 14
[4] Rev. xvii. 17. [5] Rev. xvii. 18.

The idea of the inspired writer is, thus, that the great proconsular rulers of the provinces, in the chaos which was believed to be at hand, in consequence of Nero's temporary disappearance, would not seek the dismemberment of the empire, but, though perhaps aspiring to virtual independence after a time, would join him in humiliating Rome by restoring the revived emperor to the throne, without acknowledging the right of the citizens in the matter. But this was to be followed, or preceded by their taking possession of the city, and then giving it up to plunder; making it "desolate and naked," maltreating its population, and finally burning it to the ground.[1] The commanders of the legions—Vindex, Virginius, Nymphidius Sabinus, Galba, Macer, Capito, Otho, Vitellius, Mucianus, and Vespasian, it was fancied, after thus combining to restore Nero, would do homage to him—the Beast. How widespread must have been the belief of Nero being alive among the Parthians, to lead John to such expectations!

The Jews of Palestine, after being sorely harried by the Romans, in Galilee and Peræa, for two years, had been less so since July 68; Mucianus and Vespasian being engrossed by the imperial troubles of the time, which fostered the belief that the empire was about to perish. Indeed Paul, himself, seems to have looked for this, fourteen years earlier.[2] Nor was the thought so fanciful as one might suppose, for even so calm a mind as that of Tacitus, speaks of the year in which John wrote—69—as "well-nigh the last of the republic,"[3] and Josephus tells us, that the accession of Vespasian saved the Roman State from ruin.[4]

[1] **Rev. xvii. 16.** [2] 2 Thess. ii. 1 ff. See Geikie's "St. Paul," i. **495.**
[3] **Tac.** *Hist.* i. 11. [4] *Bell. Jud.* iv. 11, 5.

But now the airy vision fades away, and John no longer sees either the Scarlet Woman, or the monstrous beast on which she sits. The unsubstantial pageant has melted into the air on which it had been painted. Afar off from the hum and distraction of men, the lonely watcher of Patmos could write down what he had seen and heard, and ponder its mysteries. Some time after, however, he felt himself once more in the Spirit, and with eyes closed to the scenes around, but open to the wonders of heavenly revelation, he sees another angel of the highest rank,[1] coming down out of the skies, with transcendent authority; and, as became a mighty envoy of the Eternal, so glorious in his majesty that the whole earth was lightened with the splendour shining from him. His mission was to proclaim the immediate destruction of the great world-city, Babylon; that is Rome. John may himself have seen the wondrous "seat of the Beast," with its accumulation of all that was beautiful and rare, on a scale never before known. There might be, under the shadow of its magnificence, dark sloughs of pestilential misery, where the slave and the poor rotted and died, to be buried in pits with beasts, but the world had been ransacked to collect, for its thousand palaces, the most precious marbles and costly grandeur. Lines of the noblest columns adorned the gardens, and mansions, and palaces, of the great; the purple and green of porphyry, the glitter of ruddy granite, marbles of every tint, yellow, orange, rose, and carnation; colossal images of dazzling white, from Carrara, or Pentelicus, or of gilded bronze; the triumphs of Greek sculptors; statues so numerous, that, even in the reign of Constantine, they were said to

[1] Rev. xviii. 1 ff.

be more abundant than the population,[1] with its myriads of slaves, high and low. Never before had power so tremendous, centralisation so grasping, luxury so insane, with a background of misery and vice so terrible, been known. On the heights of the Palatine, in this mightiest and most magnificent of cities, in sight of the golden milestone in the Forum, from which went out the military roads to all the world from Rome, from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from the North Sea to the slopes of Atlas and the rocks of Nubia, the absolute lord of both city and habitable globe had his seat. The kingdoms of earth, far and near, from the rising to the setting sun, on every side, stretching out immeasurably afar, were all his own. Like Nebuchadnezzar, "the most high God had given him the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty, so that all the peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he raised up, and whom he would he put down."[2] Humanity could not bear up under such a weight of glory. The imperial brain gave way, and madmen sat on the throne of the world, fancying themselves gods, and guilty of such deeds of blasphemy and crime as make mankind still shudder to remember.

The vision of the City of the World had, apparently, faded away, before this, of the "angel having great authority," whose glory "lightened the earth," as day shines from the golden sun. Presently, however, his "mighty voice" filled the heavens, proclaiming, in anticipation of the overthrow of that wondrous capital, now so near —"Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, and is become a

[1] Gibbon iii. 148. [2] Dan. v. 18, 19.

habitation of devils"—laid waste, and like the wilderness to which the Church had been driven,[1] or that where the Scarlet Lady, the symbol of pagan Rome, had been seen[2]—and, as a wilderness, "the hold of every unclean spirit, and of every unclean and hateful bird"—devils and unclean spirits, and foul carrion vultures, and the like, haunting such deserts.[3] She had earned this doom, which would be inflicted on her by the returning Nero, and his allied proconsuls,[4] in unconscious fulfilment of the wrath of God, for her having corrupted and destroyed all the nations by her sins, as by drugged wine; "the kings of the earth" abetting her wickedness;[5] the merchants of the world at large, having, moreover, been their eager confederates, and having grown rich "by the greatness of her wanton, immeasurable luxury and extravagance, monstrous beyond even that of ancient Tyre, as told by Ezekiel.[6]

Notwithstanding the hideous scenes of Nero's persecutions, after the Moloch Carmagnole of the year 64, to divert the charge of having set fire to the city, from the emperor to the Christians, many still remained in Rome, doing what they could for their Master. The richer classes, whom they could rarely approach, had never yielded many converts; but the poor proscribed brethren could still move freely among those more of their own social level; the wretched proletariat and the slaves. Not a few of these eagerly listened to the words of hope they brought; moved the more readily, no doubt, to do so,

[1] Rev. xii. 14. [2] Rev. xvii. 3.
[3] Matt. xii. 43; Luke xi. 24; Isa. xiii. 20–22; xxxiv. 13–15; Jer. l. 39; Zeph. ii. 14; Ps. cii. 6; Bar. iv. 35.
[4] Rev. xvii. 16. [5] Rev. xviii. 3. [6] Ezek. xxvii. 12–24.

by the transparent sincerity of those who sought to win them; content to live by daily toil in a poverty, almost as extreme, as their own; having their homes in the poorest quarters of the town, and ministering without reward to the bodily as well as spiritual wants of the most wretched and hopeless. They bore themselves, indeed, like their Master, as men amongst fellow-men, with no regard to the accidents of life, but seeing only that manhood in the highest which was also the glory of the lowest. They now, however, seemed in the vision to be told to leave Rome, as their brethren in Jerusalem had been directed to flee from it to Pella;[1] a voice, different from that of the sun-like angel, sounding down from heaven the command,[2] "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: for her sins have reached even into heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

Then, as if addressing the host of Nero and his "kings," who were presently to execute God's wrath upon her, the Voice commands them to "Render to her even as she has rendered; aye, double to her the double, according to her works; in the cup which she mingled to destroy the saints, mingle to her double." Let her torment and mourning be great as the splendour that had been her glory, and as her wantonness.[3] For, as she had said, like Babylon, of old,[4] that she sat a queen, and was no widow, and would never see mourning, so, in one day, should her plagues come; death, and mourning, and famine; and she should be utterly burned with fire, by

[1] Rev. xii. 6 ff. [2] Rev. xviii. 4 ff.
[3] Isa. xl. 2; Jer. l. 15, 29; Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9. [4] Isa. xlvii. 7.

the Beast and his captains;[1] "for strong is the Lord God who judges her" through them.[2]

The destruction of the Mistress of the World thus announced, almost overpowers the seer. What laments and wailings would rise, not from its own population alone, but from all nations! The kings of the earth, he cries out, the partners in her guilt, but now the instruments of God's avenging wrath upon her, "shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, as they stand afar off for fear of her torment," which might overwhelm themselves if they came near. "Woe, woe," men will hear them crying out, alas for "the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is thy judgment come." The merchants of the world, also, "weep and mourn over her; no one being left to buy their merchandise any more." He had seen the piled-up wealth in the warehouses of Ephesus, if not also in the great magazines on the Tiber, and in the shops and bazaars;—the cups and vessels of gold and silver, the treasures of precious stones and pearls; the fine linen, and purple and silk, and scarlet in all modes and fancies; the wealth of all kinds of fragrant wood, to fill the palaces of the great with perfume at their feasts; and vessels of ivory of endless forms for endless uses; and exhaustless riches of all that art could fashion from the most precious woods, or brass, or iron, or marble; stores of cinnamon from the far East, and priceless Asiatic ointments for the hair and incense, and ointments for the baths, and frankincense for the altars, and untold riches of wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and the cattle and sheep of a thousand hills and pastoral vales,

[1] Rev. xvii. 16. [2] Rev. xviii. 5–8.

and endless horses and chariots, and the slaves who tended them—and the myriad slaves of the field and the household, and workshops, and trades, and professions; men with souls, but ranked only as chattels. The fruits, brought from many climes, after which the soul of Rome thirsted, would be seen no more, nor would the dainty and sumptuous things so dear to her, be found in her any more at all. The merchants of all these things, whom her market made rich, would, like the kings, "stand afar off, for fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, and crying out, Woe! woe! the great city! she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones, and pearl! for in one hour so great riches is made desolate."

And as the kings and the traders, so the seafaring thousands, who gained their living on the waters, would "stand afar off, and cry, as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, What city was like the great city? and would cast dust on their heads, and cry, as they wept and mourned over her, Woe! woe! the great city, by which all that sail the sea were made rich, by the greatness of the traffic to and from it! for in one hour she is made desolate."

But, now, the voice of the angel once more breaks in, calling on heaven, with its hosts, and the earth with its "saints, and apostles, and prophets, to rejoice over her; because God has judged their judgment on her," avenging on her all the sufferings she has inflicted on His servants, and all her sins and blasphemy.[1]

Jeremiah had told Seraiah that when he had finished reading the prophet's roll, predicting the desolation of

[1] Rev. xviii. 9–20.

Babylon, he was to bind a stone to it, and cast it into the Euphrates, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise, from the evil that I will bring upon her."[1] To sink stones thus was, in antiquity, at least among the Greeks, the usual form of confirming agreements or assurances; implying that these were as settled and unchangeable as the sinking of the stone was final and irrevocable. John introduces in his present vision, a similar symbolic affirmation of the utter and permanent extinction of Rome, by the Beast—Nero—and his supporters, the kings, or satraps of provinces.[2] A mighty angel seems, in the vision, to take up a stone huge as a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, as it fell, "Thus, with a mighty fall, shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all." Nor, adds he, addressing Rome directly, "shall the voice of players on the harp, or of singers, or flute-players, or trumpet-blowers, be heard in thee any more at all; nor shall any workman of any calling be found any more at all in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for by thy sorcery were all the nations deceived."[3] Nor was the cause of her destruction doubtful, since John adds, that "in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that have been slain," in Christian times, "upon

[1] Jer. li. 63, 64. [2] Rev. xviii. 21 ff.

[3] The various details of this picture are to be found in the Prophets: Jer. xxv. 10; Isa. xxiv. 8; Ezek. xxvi. 13; Jer. vii. 34, xvi. 9; Isa. xxiii. 8; Nahum iii. 4. So intimate was John with the ancient Scriptures; so naturally did he adopt their imagery.

the earth."[1] The cry of the souls of the martyrs had entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth! Whatever troubles befell them, the churches might comfort themselves by the thought, that their blood, like that of righteous Abel, would cry from the ground for vengeance, and that that vengeance would assuredly be rained down on their enemies!

[1] Rev. xviii. 21–24; xvii. 6.

CHAPTER XV

THE APPEARING AND VICTORY OF CHRIST

JOHN does not dwell on the actual destruction of Rome, so vividly painted beforehand, but passes on to the moment after it has been "utterly burnt up,"[1] and its site turned into a desert haunted by devils, and foul beasts and birds, as that of the Chaldee Babylon had long been. The cry of the souls from below the altar in heaven had thus been fully answered at last! The dream of the Jew had been fulfilled; Rome had been annihilated by God, and Jerusalem raised, in its place, to the position of world-metropolis! For this, the Palestine revolt from Rome had been braved; for this, the Pharisee had compassed sea and land for generations; to make proselytes who would swell the great army of God, against that day when He would tread Rome under His feet, and exalt Israel above the nations. John had seen, in the brain pictures of his visions, the Holy City given up to the heathen; except the Temple and the courts of the worshippers, which Jehovah had measured off for Himself, as a refuge for His faithful ones till the foe had been swept away. This, a scene in these visions had painted in symbol, as accomplished, when the wine-press was trodden outside the city, till blood covered all the land up to the bridles of the horses.[2] Jerusalem, as we have seen,

[1] Rev. xvii. 16; xviii. 8, 2. [2] Rev. xiv. 20.

had, before this, repented of her sins, after the death and raising to heaven of the witnesses,[1] and was once more the City of the Great King, to which all the nations would come, as their religious and political centre,[2] and where Jehovah would reign on Mount Zion, "even for ever," over all mankind; the Jew being supreme. The great battle in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, foretold by Joel,[3] had already, in vision, swept Rome from Palestine.

The destruction of Rome by Nero, with the aid of his great captains and the kings of the East,[4] had been the second step in this vision-drama; and now, by the effacement of the mighty city from the earth, in which John, and even a man so acute as St. Paul, sharing the current persuasion of the Jew and Christian world, so evidently believed as almost immediate, the way was finally cleared for the coming of Christ. His kingdom as the Messiah must forthwith appear!

It must, therefore, have been only what he had expected, when, some time after the vision of the judgment on Rome, and its burning to the ground, the Spirit having come on him again, he saw, in prophetic trance, high jubilation in the heavens, at the triumph of the Lamb over His great enemy, the Roman Beast, the symbol of its world-ruling metropolis, the "Mother of Harlots;" He had heard the thunders of judgment, and the wails of the judged, but now a mighty sound of rejoicing comes from the celestial regions. "A great voice of a great multitude in heaven" seemed to fill the skies, and he seemed to hear the very words of their anthem, "Hallelujah! salvation, and glory, and power belong to our God:[5]

[1] Rev. xi. 13. [2] Isa. ii. 2; Micah iv. 1 ff. [3] Joel iii. 12 ff.
[4] Rev. xvi. 12; xvii. 16. [5] Rev. xix. 1–10.

for true and righteous are His judgments," just seen; "for He has judged the great harlot, who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and He has" thus "avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. Hallelujah!" "the smoke of her burning rising, indeed, for ever and ever," before their eyes.[1] All nature, in truth, rejoices at her destruction, for now, the four-and-twenty elders rising from their thrones, as the representatives of all the redeemed, and the four living creatures, the emblems of all animate creation, fall down and worship God, who sits on the throne,—crying, Amen, Hallelujah! Then, from the throne itself, John hears a voice, saying, "Give praise to our God, all ye His servants, ye that fear Him, the small and the great," and forthwith, in answer, there seems to rise "the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah! for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." Jesus had Himself compared His relation to His people with that of a bridegroom to a bride,[2] and the marriage bond was a frequent metaphor with the prophets, for the tender union between God and Israel.[3]

This sweet image, incorporated in John's vision, brings before him, now, a glimpse of the heavenly bride—the host of the redeemed—in her wedding robes. White linen, of the finest, "bright and pure," is her simple but perfect adornment—given then, we are told, as a symbol of "the righteous acts of the saints," which, we

[1] Rev. xix. 3; xviii. 9, 18. [2] Matt. xxii. 1; xxv. 1; ix. 15.
[3] Isa. lxii. 5; Jer. iii. 14; xxxi. 32; Hos. ii. 19, 20.

have been already assured, follow those who die in the Lord,[1] to their eternal rest.

The angel's voice is now again heard, telling John to write—"Blessed are they who are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb;" words which remind us of some we have of our Lord's, and hinting at others which must have been then current in the traditions of the churches.[2] Then he added, "These are true words of God"—their fulfilment is assured.

The dazzling glory of the heavenly speaker, the grandeur of the whole vision, and the rapture at the prospect of eternal union with Christ, were more than John could calmly bear, so that now he seemed, in his vision, to fall down at the feet of the angel, to worship him. But this was instantly forbidden. "See thou do it not," said the shining one; "I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren who hold fast the testimony of Jesus; worship God, for the testimony of Jesus" to God's eternal purposes of grace, "is the spirit"—the living breath—"of (this) prophecy" (or book, which thou art now writing. It is Christ, who has sent and signified, through me and my fellow-angels, for the comfort of the churches, what must shortly come to pass—the revelation to them of the steps heralding His speedy advent—and the disclosure of this, God gave Him, in the seven-sealed book which thou sawest Him open).[3]

This scene having, in its turn, faded away, as in the changing pictures of our own visions of the night: the seer, looking into the deep sapphire heavens of the Archipelago, sees them, as it were, open anew, and show

[1] Rev. xiv. 13. [2] Luke xiv. 15, 16; Matt. xxii. 2.
[3] Rev. i. 1–3; v. 1–7.

the far-off eternal regions. In the early passages of his visions he had seen, when the Lamb opened the first seal of the Book of Destiny, a crowned rider going out, bow in hand, on a white horse, "conquering and to conquer;" an emblem, we may think, of the Lamb, Himself; for the Lamb alone was competent to open the seals of the awful roll of the purposes of God, though the bow, so far as I remember, is not elsewhere connected with the Messiah Yet, in the Lamentations, Jehovah is poetically said to have "bent His bow like an enemy" against Jerusalem, and hence John might easily transfer it to Christ, when conceived as a warrior for His people. Nor is it infrequent, in the contradictions and fanciful combinations of a vision, —our own experience being witness,—to meet a double appearance, in opposite surroundings, of the same form; so that Jesus may, in this case, have been indicated; for, assuredly, He rides forth conquering and to conquer. Whether, however, this be so, or that image stand for an earthly power, Parthian or other, John now sees, in heaven, one who is unquestionably the Messiah, seated on a white horse, and he learns that His name is "Faithful and True"—at once, in keeping His promises to His people, and as indeed the promised Saviour, coming forth to fulfil, by His triumph, all the predictions of old, respecting the Anointed of God. Isaiah had said of "The Root of David"—a name used in the Apocalypse for Christ,[1] "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked."[2] In keeping with this, John tells us, that He would judge and make war in righteousness—true to the right, alike in defending

[1] Rev. v. 5. [2] Isa. xi. 4.

His saints and in crushing their enemies. His eyes had twice before been compared to a flame of fire, and this is now repeated.[1] But while, in former visions, He wore only a single crown,[2] He now wears many, as the "King of kings;"[3] monarchs in those times, often wearing more crowns than one, to show their sovereignty over different realms, as Ptolemy wore two on entering Antioch; the crown of Asia and that of Egypt.[4] All these crowns, in the case of The Faithful and True, were, moreover, His alone; not as in those of the great dragon and the Beast, each head or horn of which had only one.[5] Were these crowns an anticipation of His presently wearing all those of the enemies He was about to destroy? He had once stood in the guard-room of Pilate, scourged and bleeding, with the scarlet cloak of a soldier thrown over Him in mockery of an imperial robe, and a crown of thorns about His brows; but now![6] A mysterious name, seen, but not yet, at least, to be grasped by any one, stood out, perhaps on His forehead, like the seal of God on the forehead of the saints.

Isaiah had seen the Deliverer of the nation "coming from Edom and Bozrah; bearing Himself proudly in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save; His apparel red, like those of the treader of the purple grapes of the wine vat, with the blood of the foes of His people, whom He has trodden under foot in His anger, and trampled upon in His fury,"[7] and so, the visionary spectacle opening sublimely before John, shows him Jesus, the Messiah, robed, as He sits on the white horse, in a garment bespattered with blood.[8] His name, moreover, he is told, is the Word

[1] Rev. i. 14; ii. 18. [2] Rev. vi. 2. [3] Rev. xix. 16.
[4] 1 Macc. xi. 13. [5] Rev. xii. 3; xiii. 1. [6] Mark xv. 17
[7] Isa. lxiii. 1–3. [8] Rev. xix. 13.

of God—that name used by the fourth Gospel to indicate Christ's divinity,[1] as the eternally pre-existing, and omnipotent revelation of the Godhead, carrying out the divine will in creation and Providence; a name borrowed from rabbinical theology, but adopted by the Alexandrian Christian school.

Behind this awful leader rode the heavenly armies, also on white horses, the colour of those on which victors rode in the great Roman triumphs—arrayed in fine linen, white and pure—the symbol at once of their righteousness[2] and of their coming victory. Out of the mouth of the "Word," their Head, in harmony with the image of Isaiah, proceeded a sharp sword; a metaphor found also in the earlier visions of the seer himself.[3] With this he was about to smite the heathen nations;[4] ruling them, as we are told, in words taken from the Psalms,[5] and as John has already twice said, "with a rod of iron,"[6] and, in the language of Old Testament imagery "treading the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God."[7] To complete the picture, it is added, that He had on His girdle, keeping together His garment, and resting on His thigh, a second name written, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Of the descent to earth of this celestial army, under its great Leader, the seer makes no mention, but St. Paul's conception of it aids us where John is silent. The apostle of the Gentiles sees, in spirit, "the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire," "for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout"

[1] John i. 1 and x. [2] Rev. xix. 8. [3] Rev. i. 16; ii. 12.
[4] Isa. xi. 4. [5] Ps. ii. 9. [6] Rev. ii. 27; xii. 5.
[7] Rev. xiv. 10, 19; Isa. li. 22; Ps. lxxv. 9.

of command, to His hosts, "with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God."[1]

Where the great battle was to be joined is left in the same mysterious vagueness, but its pitiless carnage is pre-announced by an angel, who shines out from amidst the inferior splendour of the sun, and, in the language of Ezekiel,[2] in his vision of a similar overthrow of the enemies of God, summons, "with a loud voice," all the ravenous birds to come to "the great supper of God, that they may eat the flesh of kings, captains, and mighty men, and of horses and their riders, and of all men, both free and slave, and small and great."[3] The unburied slain were to be eaten by wild beasts and obscene birds; the most terrible indignity that could be shown the dead in antiquity, and the world was to be left unpeopled, for "all men" were to perish; except, of course, those on Christ's side.

In accordance with this, the Beast, that is, Nero, having wreaked vengeance on Rome, and having, finally, "burnt it utterly with fire," is now seen turning, once more, against Christ and His saints; the dragon, Satan, using him still as his willing instrument. But the battle goes sore against him, for he himself is taken, and with him, the false prophet, who by his illusive "signs" had deceived men to worship him and wear his mark. These two are cast, alive, into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. The rest, however, who fell, simply pass, as disembodied shades, into Hades; to await the general judgment at the final resurrection; the birds, meanwhile, being gorged with their flesh.[4]

But the end was not yet.[5] An angel now descends, in

[1] 2 Thess. i. 7, 8; 1 Thess. iv. 16. [2] Ezek. xxxix. 4, 17–20.
[3] Rev. xix. 17 ff. [4] Rev. xix. 21. [5] Rev. xx. 1–3.

the vision, from heaven, with the key of the abyss,—the bottomless pit, the gloomy realm of devils. Besides the key, he carries a great chain, and having bound Satan with it, casts him down the mouth of the awful prison, shutting and sealing it over him; not to be reopened for a thousand years. For that time, therefore, he would be unable to deceive the nations any more, but after that, the mysterious providence of God would let him loose again for a little while.

The conception of a reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years is peculiar to the Apocalypse. We read of angels, when they sinned, being cast down into hell, and committed to pits of darkness, to be reserved to judgment,[1] and of angels who kept not their own principality, but (mutinously) left their proper habitation; being kept by God in everlasting bonds, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day;[2] but a temporary imprisonment of Satan is found only in this book. It appears to be related to the Jewish idea that there would be a Sabbath for the world, as for creation at first; each world-day being reckoned as a thousand years,[3] and the world-Sabbath being Isaiah's "year of the redeemed."[4] The Second Book of Esdras, which is of the same date as the Apocalypse, and, like it, is the work of a Jewish-Christian, has, indeed, something akin to this millennium, though its duration is shorter. Jesus is to be revealed, with His saints, and will rejoice those who remain alive on earth, four hundred years. But after that time, He is to die, with all who have the breath of life, and the world will lie in Sabbath rest, "in the old silence, as in the first beginning;" man no longer existing on it, and

[1] 2 Pet. ii. 4. [2] Jude 6. [3] Philo. *Leg All.* i. 2. [4] Isa. lxiii. 4.

the resurrection will come, and the final judgment, after seven days, that is, thousand-year periods.[1]

During these thousand years of Satan's imprisonment, Christ, we are told, is to reign with his saints[2] in "the beloved city;" for Jerusalem, as we have seen, had been delivered from the Roman armies, and received again into God's favour, on its repenting, after the death of the two witnesses.[3] But this reign of Christ is to be shared only by those who had been "beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and by such as had not worshipped the Beast or his image, or received his mark on their forehead or hand." These are to be raised from the dead, and live and reign with Christ, during the millennium—their restoration to life being a "first resurrection"—for the rest of the dead were not to rise till the thousand years were over.[4] Thrones are now seen in the vision, but it does not say how many, nor who sat on them, though we may, perhaps, gather this from other allusions to the Messianic kingdom. Daniel sees the Ancient of Days, throned in "the kingdom of the saints,"[5] which is handed over to one in human form, "like a son of man,"[6] who "came to the Ancient of Days with the clouds of heaven, and was brought before Him." Our Lord, moreover, tells us that the apostles, "in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, shall also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[7] But as the partakers of this first resurrection must embrace members of all races, one thinks naturally of the twenty-four throned elders who

[1] 2 Esdras vii. 28 ff., R.V. [2] Rev. xx. 4, 9. [3] Rev. xi. 13; xiv. 20.
[4] Rev. xx. 4–7. [5] Dan. vii. 9, 13, 14, 18, 22, 27. [6] Revised Version.
[7] Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 30.

represent the saved of all ages, and may suppose that the Patriarchs of the old Economy now shared a like glory with the Apostles, so as to make up twenty-four thrones in all. But, all alike, in that interval of heavenly joy on earth, are "blessed and holy." They die no more, having once died "in the Lord," nor are they in any danger of the second, eternal death, at the final judgment; beginning their immortal felicity at once, and reigning with Christ as priests of God and the Lamb.[1]

But this happy time wears away, and the drama of the world is to be closed with a tremendous outburst of Satanic violence, ending in the final overthrow of Satan, and the last judgment, deciding all things, for eternity. The millennium seems to expire during the brief trance of the seer, in the strange dream-land of vision; for in sleep or the ecstatic condition related to it, there is no sense of duration. Time is only a thought, in visions. The thousand years of Satan's imprisonment seeming, therefore, to be over, John tells us, he was loosed, and came up to the earth again, to deceive the "nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war" against "the camp of the saints, and the beloved city"[2]—Jerusalem; their number being "as the sand of the sea."[3] Thus, though the angel had summoned the vultures to "eat the flesh of all men,"[4] it must be assumed that mankind had not wholly perished in the war against Nero and his supporters;[5] these new assailants of the Christians being represented as remote Scythian nations, the Gog and Magog of the Old Testament, who must be assumed as dwelling outside the sphere of that terrible

[1] Isa. lxi. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 6; v. 10.
[2] Rev. xx. 7, 10. [3] Rev. xx. 7, 10. [4] Rev. xix. 18. [5] Rev. xix. 19.

visitation. The two names, indeed, represent all the so-called barbarous peoples in the farthest north and north-east of the then known world, and are reproduced here from a vision of Ezekiel.[1] In that, they represent the heathen at large, who seek to destroy Israel, purified by its sufferings in Babylon, and restored to its own land by the Messiah, and thus the fit emblem of the Israel of the Apocalypse purified by the woes of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, from which they are represented as delivered by the hosts of Christ. It is curious to notice that they play a similar part in Jewish theology as in that of John, for the Jerusalem Targum says,[2] "In the end of the last days, Gog and Magog and their armies will go up against Jerusalem, and will fall by the hands of the King Messiah, and the sons of Israel will be busied in burning their arms, every day, for seven years." This rabbinical fancy must have thus been known to John.

On these outlying nations the devil sets his last hope. It was his dearest work, to "go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.[3] Once more he had been successful, and had stirred up the peoples afar off, to invade Palestine, the realm of the Messiah. Marching thither across distant lands, they at last "compass about" the camp of the saints; so called, perhaps, in remembrance of a similar name for the wilderness camp of Israel,[4] and beleaguered "the beloved city." But their fate was not delayed, for John sees fire come down out of

[1] The Assyrian inscriptions show that "Gog" is a transformation of Gyges, the Lydian king; Magog being only a corruption of it. But the Hebrews, knowing nothing of these far-off lands, applied the two names as I have said, in the text. Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix.

[2] On Num. xi. 27. [3] Rev. xvi. 14. [4] Deut. xxiii. 14.

heaver, and devour them. The last attempt to injure the people of God had thus failed. Jerusalem had long before been chastened and won to Christ; Rome had been blotted from the face of the earth; the Beast and the false prophet had been cast into the abyss; the Jewish-Christian kingdom of the Messiah had flourished in Jerusalem for a thousand years; the final attack on it by Satan, the dragon, had been defeated; it only remained to remove the devil from the earth, and to keep him, henceforth, from ever troubling the peace of the redeemed. To effect this, the great deceiver, who had been the inspiring soul of all the enmity of Rome, was now finally cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where, already were the Beast and the false prophet; and there, adds John, "they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." There remains only the final judgment, to close the story of the world!

The burden of the Apocalypse, now virtually ended, thus shows that John had no idea that Jerusalem would be destroyed immediately, and that he regarded Rome as so thoroughly moribund, that both the empire and city would perish in the anticipated return of Nero: that is, within so many months; for the time before Christ's return, when all this was to happen, was "short"; He would "come quickly,"[1] and "the time was at hand." An earthly world-kingdom of the Messiah was to take the place of the "great Babylon" for a thousand years, during which the martyrs and confessors of Christ, raised from the dead, were to reign with Him at Jerusalem. Then would come the last struggle of Satan, and after that, the General Resurrection and the Great Judgment would see the fall

[1] Rev. i. 1; iii. 11.

of the curtain on our earth. But, as we shall see, a new earth, canopied by new heavens, was to appear, in the place of the heaven and earth over and round us now, which would then have "fled away from before the face of Him who sat on the great white throne." In the same way, "new heavens, and a new earth," in which only righteousness would dwell, are anticipated by St. Peter;[1] our present heavens passing away with a great noise; the heavenly bodies in it being melted into vapour by fervent heat, and the earth and everything on it burned up, in the "day of the Lord," the "end of all things," which, in common with all Christians of his generation, he believed to be "at hand."[2] St. Peter, thus, like John, must have thought this world would be the scene of our eternal felicity, so that both appear to have differed from St. Paul, about the future home of the redeemed; for the Apostle of the Gentiles tells the Corinthians that "we shall not all sleep"—that is, die,—"but we shall all be changed, in a moment, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we" who are still alive "shall be changed."[3] Or, as he says elsewhere, "by the word of the Lord." "We that are alive and are left"—that is, survive—"till the coming of the Lord, shall not in any way have the advantage over those who have died. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then, we who are alive, that are left" in the body, "shall, together with them, be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 10–13. [2] 1 Pet. iv. 7.
[3] 1 Cor. xv. 52.

shall we ever be with the Lord."[1] Yet St. Peter, though he speaks thus of the paradise of a new earth in which only righteousness will dwell, speaks, also, of our inheritance being reserved in heaven, incorruptible, undefiled and unfading,[2] just as Paul calls it "the inheritance of the saints in light,"[3] or as our Lord says, "In My Father's house are many mansions; I go," from earth, "to prepare a place for you, and I come again and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am ye may be also."[4] But we shall meet this subject again, when we have before us John's description of the New Jerusalem.

All foes vanquished; the heathen world-empire a dream of the long past; the site of Rome a place for the wild beasts and satyrs of the wilderness; Antichrist himself cast into the pit; the distant heathen nations consumed by fire from heaven; Satan and the hierarchy of "false prophets," or, as we now say, "teachers," thrown into the abyss; Jerusalem glorified by the reign of Christ in it for a thousand years, surrounded by His holy martyrs and confessors, raised from the dead to form His millennial kingdom; it only remained to bring the story of the past to a close by the Final Judgment; to award rewards to the righteous, and punishment to the unworthy. The earth was desolate, without an inhabitant; those only having been preserved from the grave, who, as partakers of the first resurrection, had gathered round their Lord at Jerusalem. All mankind, therefore, who had ever lived, with the insignificant exception of the saints of the millennium, were now to be brought back to life, to stand before the Judge.

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 15–18. [2] 1 Pet. i. 4. [3] Col. i. 12. [4] John xiv. 2, 3.

Of this sublime consummation a dream-picture was now vouchsafed to John. In his prophetic trance there appeared a Great White Throne, and Him who sat on it. There had been other thrones[1] in the same vision, but, though glowing beyond thought, they were as nothing compared to this: at once so great, and so white with glory. With the awe of a Jew, he shrinks, as in the past,[2] from naming God, the Judge,[3] of whose majesty and holiness it spoke. Daniel had revealed the great Judge as "the Ancient of Days,"[4] and John in the opening of the Apocalypse had heard Him proclaiming Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Lord God, the Almighty.[5] But though, thus, in John's vision, the seat on the throne is taken by "God"; Christ is constantly represented elsewhere, as actually presiding. "God," says Paul, "shall, in that day, judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ."[6] "We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." "The Lord Jesus shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing."[7] Jesus, Himself, indeed, tells us that when He, "the Son of man, shall come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations."[8] Yet, in Hebrews, "God" is named as "the Judge of all,"[9] so that the names of God and our Lord are used interchangeably, as equivalents. From before the awful splendours of the face of this Almighty Judge, the earth and the heaven seemed,

[1] Rev. xx. 4. [2] Rev. iv. 2. [3] Rev. xx. 12.
[4] Dan. vii. 9. [5] Rev. xxi. 6; i. 8. [6] Rom. ii. 16.
[7] Rom. xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10; 2 Tim. iv. 1. [8] Matt. xxv. 31, 32.
[9] Heb. xii. 23.

in the vision, to flee away, "and there was found no place for them." In Shakspere's words—

> ". . . Like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind."

The throne must therefore have stood in mid-air. St. Peter predicts the same ending of our world, for he says, "it is reserved against the day of judgment, to be then destroyed by fire," [1] and "the heavens, being thus on fire, shall be dissolved, and the heavenly bodies shall melt with fervent heat.'

In the vast emptiness, inconceivable to us, the dead, small and great, were now seen standing before the throne—kings and slaves in one great multitude; their earthly distinctions forgotten. Presently "the books were opened, in which the deeds of all men had been recorded,[2] and, with them, another—the Book of Life—in which were inscribed the names of all who were deemed worthy of the citizenship of the New Jerusalem. By these books the dead were judged, "out of, those things written in them, according to their works." [3] "And the sea," we are told, "gave up the dead which were in it; and Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every man according to their works." [4] John does not speak of the trump of God, or the shout of the archangel, waking the myriad dead,[5] but has before Him only the final scene. Death

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 7, 12. [2] Mal. iii. 16; Ps. lvi. 8; Isa. lxv. 6; Rev. xx. 12.
[3] Rev. iii. 5; xiii. 8; xvii. 8. [4] Rev. xx. 13.
[5] 1 Cor. xv. 52; 1 Thess. iv. 16.

was the last enemy to be destroyed.[1] Personified, with Hades, as a demoniac power, both are cast into the lake of fire, which is called "the second death," and, with them, all who were not found written in the Book of Life. This fearful place of torment is mentioned also in the Book of Enoch, and was thus, evidently, a popular conception of the age.[2] Then the curtain falls, for the time, on empty space, from which heaven and earth have alike vanished away.

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 26. [2] Enoch xc. 26

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW JERUSALEM

ALL the foes of the Lamb and His followers being, at last, destroyed for ever, John is able to present to the churches the revelation which it is the pervading and single aim of his book to disclose—the eternal completion of "the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which He had, through ages, declared to His servants the prophets;"[1] the fulfilment of all the promises made by our Lord to the suffering Christians to whom John writes; their support in all their trials, and the object of their most earnest hopes. He has told fully the doom of the enemies of the Church; it only remains to tell the bliss which was now to be enjoyed by all its faithful members.[2]

A new scene therefore opens. The first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea no more existed. The redeemed must be conceived as, for the time, with Christ, in the upper heavens, but now John sees a new heaven and a new earth rise into being, whether with or without a new sea, is not told. It is possible, however, that the hatred of the sea by the Jews, from their having been kept from having seaports, through the strength of the peoples of the Palestine coast plain, may have kept him from mentioning an ocean as part of the new creation. Isaiah had spoken, like John, of "new heavens and a new earth,"[3] and

[1] Rev. x. 7. [2] Rev. xxi. 1 ff. [3] Isa. lxv. 17; lvi. 22.

Apocryphal books current in John's day repeated the thought, as we see in the Book of Enoch, and in Second Esdras,[1] and Christ had spoken of the "regeneration," or renewal, of all things, in His kingdom on earth,[2] so that the idea was familiar in the apostolic age.

A fresh wonder, however, arrests the eyes of the seer. It was a cherished and constantly recurring article of Jewish theology that, after the earth and heaven had been renewed, in preparation for the kingdom of the Messiah, a New Jerusalem would descend to earth from heaven as the capital of the renovated world, and the royal city of God's Anointed.[3] "God will renew His world," says Sohar,[4] "and will build Jerusalem (in heaven), that He may cause it to descend from heaven into the centre of the world, so that it may never again be destroyed," and in similar language Christ, Himself, tells the Philadelphian church, of "the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God."[5] This wonder now appears in John's vision. He sees "the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God," shining out through the surrounding golden air—the effulgence of the glory of God—"beautified and made ready for the redeemed, as a bride is adorned for her (marriage to her) husband." It is to be the home of the saints, and this "blessed company of all faithful people" is represented as the Bride of the Lamb; a sweet figure of the relation of God with His people, often found in the Prophets,

[1] Enoch. xlv. 4, 5; lxxii. 1; xci. 14–16; civ. 1–6; 2 Esdras vii. 31.
[2] Matt. xix. 27.
[3] 2 Esdras xiii. 25, 26; Schöttgen, *Hor. Heb.* i. 1205; Hesshom's *Treasures of the Talmud*, 210.
[4] Sohar, *Gen.* fl. 69.
[5] Rev. iii. 12.

and of that of Christ with His redeemed, in the New Testament.

Meanwhile a great voice sounds from the throne proclaiming that God will condescend to dwell among men; expressing this by the Oriental figure of His setting up His tent or tabernacle in their midst; words dear to the Jew, as found even in Leviticus,[1] where God promises Israel that He "will set His tabernacle among them, and will walk among them, and be their God, and they shall be His people;" a promise repeated in Ezekiel.[2] "They moreover," says John—like Israel of old, "shall be His peoples"—not people—"and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."[3] Then, in the beautiful language of Isaiah,[4] it is added; "and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more," or, as the prophet renders it, "sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying,"[5] for "the first things," John reminds us, "are passed away."

The voice of God, Himself, now again sounds from the throne, proclaiming that He makes all things new. A new and purified heavens and earth were, indeed, alone fit for the new dispensation, now that the old sinful state of things was gone for ever. This inauguration of the New Messianic Kingdom, thus announced, an angel directs John to write down what he has seen and heard, "for these words are faithful and true;" thus giving the sorely-tried Christians the surest pledge that their utmost hopes were fully justified. That they were so is forth-

[1] Lev. xxvi. 11, 12. [2] Ezek. xliii. 7. [3] Rev. xxi. 3.
[4] Isa. xxv. 8. [5] Isa. xxxv. 10; lxv. 19.

with confirmed by the voice of God Himself, which once more breaks in, saying, "Let these things come to pass!" Old things had already vanished, and John saw, even then, the New Jerusalem descending from the heavens.[1] Nor could God's word be doubtful, for He rehearses the titles of His Majesty as "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."[2] As such, He condescends to animate His servants by tender promises, while denouncing woes on the unworthy. "I will give," says He, in words which repeat the sweet figure of Isaiah[3] to be repeated hereafter,[4] "unto him that is athirst, of the fountain of the water of life freely;" words grateful to the inhabitant of dry and thirsty lands. Then, adopting the words of Christ to the churches,[5] He continues, "He that overcometh shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son;" words spoken, for the Eternal, long ages before, by Nathan[6] and by the prophet Zechariah, when Israel was under Persia.[7] The unworthy, on the contrary, will witness huge affliction and dismay. "But for the fearful," who give way, in the battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and do not overcome, "and for the unbelieving, and those who have made themselves loathsome by their apostasy, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

Another scene in the vision now opens. One of the seven angels who had poured the seven last plagues on the earth, seems to come to John, and invites him to "come hither," it is not said where, and he would be

[1] Verse 2. [2] Rev. i. 8; xxi. 13; Isa. xliv. 6. [3] Isa. lv. 1.
[4] Rev. xxii. 17. [5] Rev. ii. 7. [6] 2 Sam. vii. 14. [7] Zech. viii. 8

shown "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." Forthwith he felt himself apparently carried away to a great high mountain, as Ezekiel had seemed to be in the vision of his Messianic Jerusalem,[1] and there he saw the Holy City, Jerusalem, descending from above the clouds to the new earth. It "shone with the glory of God,"[2] the light from it being like that of a stone most precious, in tint like that of jasper, but yet as transparent as pure crystal. The city was thus self-illuminating, and had no need of the sun or moon;[3] the glory of God in its midst,[4] shining, sunlike, through its every part, and shedding an eternal day through all its streets and habitations. A wall "great and high" enclosed it; pierced with twelve gates, like the New Jerusalem of Ezekiel,[5] three on each of its four sides, guarded by twelve angel-warders; the twelve gates, as in Ezekiel's vision, being called after the twelve tribes of Israel. The wall, moreover, had twelve foundation-stones, visible to the seer, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles.[6]

The angel who accompanied John now produced a golden reed, to measure the city, with its wall and gates, as had been done in the visions of the restored Jerusalem, in the visions of both Ezekiel and Zechariah.[7] Like Ezekiel's city,[8] the heaven-descended metropolis of the new earth was square in shape: its "length and breadth" being equal, and, when measured by the angel the result was found to be twelve thousand furlongs or fifteen hundred miles, but whether this was the length of each side, or of the whole four sides, is not stated. In either case the

[1] Ezek. xi. 2. [2] Isa. lx. 1. [3] Verse 23. [4] Zech. ii. 5.
[5] Ezek. xlviii. 31–34. [6] Eph. ii. 20. [7] Ezek. xl. 3; Zech. ii. 1.
[8] Ezek. xlviii. 16.

figures show how indisputably Apocalyptic visions must be regarded as "visionary" imaginations, for if taken literally, as giving the length of each side, the city would have been fifteen hundred miles square, though Palestine is only about fifty miles across at Jerusalem. It would, in fact, mean that the Jerusalem of the earth to come, will reach from about where Khartoum lies, in Africa, on the south, to the Sea of Azof, above the Black Sea, on the north, and from the coast of Palestine to the borders of Afghanistan. If, however, the measure be that of the four sides, together, the square of the city would still be 375 miles, or nearly twice and a half the whole length of Palestine, from Dan to Beersheba. We must, therefore, suppose John to have carried rabbinical or Oriental modes of speaking into his description, for the dimensions he assigns to this city, like the details that follow, are exactly in keeping with rabbinical pictures of the Jerusalem which they also expect to come down to the earth out of heaven.

The wall of this vast architectural creation was only a hundred and forty-four cubits, or, say, two hundred and twenty feet high, but the same stupendous scale is apportioned to the height of its buildings as to its external bounds, for "the height and the length and the breadth of the city are equal," so that its houses are represented as either 1500, or, at least, 375 miles high.[1] The wall, we are told, was of jasper, but the city, as a whole, was of pure gold, which, however, was as perfectly transparent as pure glass,[2] so that it "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light, or lamp, thereof;" and thus, eternal day illumines all its happy

[1] Rev. xxi. 16. [2] Rev. xxi. 18.

abodes. Isaiah had pictured the restored Jerusalem, after the Exile, as having its stones cemented with the highly-prized antimony,—the eye paint of the East,—and its foundations laid with sapphires; its battlements formed of rubies; its mighty gateways of carbuncle, and its enclosing walls, of pleasant, that is, precious[1] stones. And Tobit, about three hundred years before Christ, had seen in imagination the times when Jerusalem shall be builded with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stones: its walls, and towers and battlements with pure gold, and its streets paved with beryl and carbuncle and stones of Ophir.[2] Following such Oriental imaginations, John now describes the foundations of *his* Jerusalem as adorned with all kinds of precious stones—jaspers, lapis-lazuli, red carnelians, green emeralds, milk-white sardonyx, blood-red sardius, the golden-coloured topaz, the sea-green beryl, the orange topaz, the green chrysoprase, the purple-blue jacinth, and the violet amethyst. The twelve gateways, huge, no doubt, as those of Eastern cities now, were of pearl; a single pearl forming each, and the houses were of pure gold, which, however, was, as I have said, transparent as glass,[3] as was needed, when there was no light but the Divine glory.

There had been a temple in the former Jerusalem, but none would be needed in this, for the whole city was a temple, as the dwelling-place of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. As the Bride of the Lamb, with whom the Bridegroom makes His abiding home, it glories, as I have said, in the full brightness of His presence and of that of the Eternal Father; neither sun nor moon being needed, though we must suppose them to have shone out again, in the new heavens. In the words of Isaiah[4]—

[1] Isa. liv. 11, 12. [2] Tobit xiii. 16, 17. [3] Rev. xxi. 21. [4] Isa lx. 1.

"the glory of the Lord had risen upon it." All that follows is, only, the refrain of the ancient prophets, of whose high shadowings-forth of the splendour of the City of God, all that John saw in his visions was the final realisation. "The (once heathen) nations," says he, "shall walk amidst its light: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." And that there might be no hindrance to their entrance and that of all the nations of the earth, "its gates shall in no wise be shut by day," which, in this case, means all the twenty-four hours, since "there shall be no night there." Through these, "they will bring the glory and honour of the nations"—as offerings to God and the Lamb,—"into it." Isaiah had in similar language sung of *his* Jerusalem—"The nations shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising: therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that they may bring into thee the wealth of the nations, and their kings with them,"—as subjects of the Messiah. "The sun shall no more be thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."[1] The prophets had said of this Jerusalem of the Return, that the way to it would be called The Way of Holiness, over which the unclean would not be allowed to pass;[2] that there should no more come into it the uncircumcised and the unclean;[3] that its people should be all righteous;[4] that it should be holy, and that no heathen should pass through it any more.[5] So, John tells us,[6] that there shall in no wise enter into it any-

[1] Isa. lx. 3, 11, 19. See also Ps. lxxii. 10; Zech. xiv. 6, 7.
[2] Isa. xxxv. 8. [3] Isa. lii. 1. [4] Isa. lx. 21. [5] Joel iii. 17. [6] Rev. xxii. 27.

thing unclean (in the Jewish sense), or he that is tainted with idol abominations, or has to do with such lies: but only they who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Ezekiel[1] had seen a river flowing eastward, from under the Temple of the Jerusalem of the Return; swelling into a mighty stream in its course; its banks adorned by many trees on both sides, including all kinds of fruit-bearing growths; the leaves unwithering, and the fruit never failing, but new each month; because the waters on whose banks all the verdure stands, stream forth from the Temple of God. The fruit, moreover, was for meat and the leaves for healing. Zechariah had seen living waters going out, east and west from Jerusalem.[2] John now, in his vision, is shown by the angel "a river of water of life," in the New Jerusalem—"bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb—in the midst of it."[3] On each side of the river was the tree of life, a reminiscence, in the dreamer's thoughts, of Eden—and bringing back to my own the long vistas of trees of all fruitful kinds which shade the banks of the smooth Abana, as it flows softly through Damascus, to-day. John's tree of life, moreover, bore "twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves were for the healing of the weary nations,"[4] coming as travel-worn pilgrims to the holy city; the fruit supplying food for them and for all the happy population.

Every enemy of God had been long destroyed, so that there was no more curse on the earth, the nations that

[1] Ezek. xlvii. 1 ff. [2] Zech. xiv. 8

[3] πλατεῖα, the word translated street, means also a broad space. "The street" seems very constrained in the present case.

[4] Rev. xxii. 2.

had once been heathen, being now Christian—for John re-peoples the world, although "all men" had perished in the great battle of Armageddon;[1] such license being granted in the scenery of visions. Instead of a curse, indeed, there is the abiding presence of God, for "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall do Him service, and they shall see His face," as had been promised from of old;[2] "and His name shall be on their foreheads," as on the brow of those sealed long before;[3] a sign that they are His, and also their crowning glory. The suffering Christians are, moreover, once more told, that night, the symbol of earthly weakness, and, in its darkness, of former sin, shall be gone for ever; nor will they "need the light of a lamp, nor of the sun," for it will be always bright, since "the Lord God shall give them light." And in this beatific home, here on earth, the redeemed shall reign for ever and ever.[4]

The revelation of the mystery of Christ had now been finished. It only remained to add a few words: the angel who had shown him the city introducing them by seeming, in John's trance, to say, "These words" of promise "are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God who inspires the spirits of the prophets," of whom thou art one, "sent" me, "His angel,"[5] as the speaker for Jesus Christ, "to show to His servants the things" of which the opening scenes "must shortly come to pass." For, through me, He says, "Behold, I come quickly,"[6] as was said at the opening of this book.[7] "Blessed is he that

[1] Rev. xix. 18, 21; xx. 9.
[2] Ps. xvii. 15; Matt. v. 8; 1 John iii. 2; 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
[3] Rev. vii. 3; iii. 12; xiv. 1. [4] Rev. xxii. 5. [5] Rev. i. 1.
[6] Rev. iii. 11, 10, 12, 20. [7] Rev. i. 3.

keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book;" for the time is at hand.

John now comes forward in his own person, to tell his readers that he, John, had heard and seen these things, and that they so overpowered him that he fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown them to him, and spoke as the mouthpiece of the Lord Himself. But he was instantly forbidden to offer such homage, the angel telling him that he, also, was only a fellow-servant with him, and with his brethren, the great company of the prophets of all times, and with the lowly Christians who should keep the words of the book now finished. He was to worship God only.

A few closing words; and all was over, but, now, not from the angel but from Jesus Himself, the light of other worlds which had for a time painted on the air of Patmos vision after vision, disclosing mysteriously the secrets of the invisible world would fade away into that of common life, and instead of the throne of God, and the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect, or of the cryptic symbolism of dragon and monstrous beast, and the terrors of avenging wrath, there would be around the seer only the heights and hollows of Patmos and its humble fisher population and the blue sky above, outfaced by the azure of the ocean around; and time, in short, in all its commonplace familiarities, instead of the wonders of eternity.

In these parting sentences John was told not to seal up the roll on which he had written down the wonders he had seen and heard, as if these disclosures were designed for the benefit of some future generation. It was, on the contrary, to be left open, that the churches

might read it at once, because "the time was at hand" for the fulfilment of all it contained: so short, indeed, for sinners and saints alike, before the end of all things would come, that the condition of the worthy and unworthy was virtually fixed already. It was too late for any change! The white flag of mercy was at last withdrawn!

11. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he who is righteous, let him do righteousness still; and he who is holy, let him be still more so. 12. Behold I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to each man according to his work. 13. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 14. Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. 15. Outside are, and shall remain, the dogs,[1] and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

16. I, Jesus, have sent Mine angel to testify these things for the benefit of the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright, the morning star.[2]

As he listened, in rapt adoration, such words naturally woke in John an intense longing for his Lord's appearing, which breaks out in a sentence apparently interrupting the words of Christ—"The Spirit," which inspired the prophets, "and the bride," alike, O Lord, "say Come!" Then, addressing those who should hear his book read in the church assemblies, he cries out—"And he that heareth, let him say, Come," O Lord! Then, with an all-embracing love and pity which forgets the solemn words about the righteous and the unrighteous being already marked as such by the Saviour Himself, he

[1] Phil. iii. 2. [2] Rev. xxii. 10–17.

calls on every one to seek a share in the felicities that will attend the Advent. "And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life, freely" —that is, in the words of Isaiah, "without money and without price!"[1]

A solemn warning follows, against any liberties being taken with "the words of the prophecy of this book" by any one hearing them read out in the meetings of the Christians. "If any one add to them," as he might be tempted to do, in times so constantly changing, and with so light a notion as prevailed about changing written documents, "God shall add unto him the plagues written in it," or "if any one take away from them, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city," and in all the promises respecting them "which are written in this book."

Then comes the last line.

He who testifies these things, that is, Jesus Christ, says, Verily, I come quickly.

Then John adds,

Amen; Come, Lord Jesus!
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen!

Thus ends the last book of the New Testament. I venture to think it has shown itself, when carefully examined, to have been what we may without irreverence call, literally, a Tract of the Times; written in a style, perhaps forced on those ages, to conceal, except from the initiated, predictions and hopes dangerous to express openly; and, already, for centuries, adopted in every great crisis of Jewish history, as specially appropriate to

[1] Rev. xxii. 17.

the subjects treated. Introduced, apparently, by Ezekiel, it had become almost sacred among Jews, and, through them, among Christians, and was destined to remain so for some centuries longer. As the past, moreover, had produced so many Apocalyptic writings among the Jews, it was almost inevitable that the intense excitement respecting the return of Christ and His judgment of the enemies of His people would produce a new Christian Apocalypse. The oppression of Antiochus, the Roman occupation of Palestine under Pompey, and the reign of Herod, had each had its own, and it would have been strange, in such a time, if there had not appeared just such a Christian counterpart of these Jewish cryptic writings, as that of John, to meet the crisis of Nero's enormities. Later on, indeed, there would be others, under Domitian, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Decius, and the invasion of the empire by the Goths, in A.D. 250: Christian public opinion craving them as much as did that of the Jew. Prophetic-like obscurity characteristic in all ages of communications claiming to be from above, seems instinctively to have been felt by all races believing in oracles, whether at Delphi, Jerusalem, or Ephesus. But, apart from the love of mystery natural to us all, messages from a higher world must needs be couched in cloudy metaphor even when really inspired, since they come from a sphere of which we know nothing, and treat of matters, as a rule, more or less future. In Apocalyptic books, moreover, as I have said, political allusions to great personages and public affairs necessitated a caution which sought the veil of imagery and symbol, just as, in later days, secret matters of state were hidden in the mysteries of cipher writing. Among the more or less Orientally-

minded circles to whom Apocalyptic writings were addressed, there was, moreover, a sympathy with the monstrous and colossal in religious metaphor, as we see in the mythology and prophetic compositions of the ancient Mesopotamian nations, from whom Western Asia took their literary style in such matters. Influenced, doubtless, by this, the literature of Scripture, from the time of the Babylonian Captivity, catches the features of its new experiences, so that in Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel we have mysterious visions, and gigantic, ultra-human, machinery, if I may so speak, unknown at an earlier date, and this spread, erelong, outside the circle of canonical Prophets, to all the Jewish literary classes concerned either with Apocalyptic studies, or, as scribes and rabbis, devoting themselves to the exposition of the Sacred Books.

Among others, John followed the prevailing mode. An intense student of the Prophets, his mind was saturated with their spirit and his memory filled with their imagery, but he had been hardly less earnest in his devotion to rabbinical theology, for, as we have seen, his pictures are often coloured by its ideas. It is, indeed, a striking illustration of the complete intellectual freedom left to those employed by God as the vehicles of His revelations, to find how much there is in the Apocalypse borrowed from the canonical Prophets, and even from the Jewish literature of the day. Its adaptations from the Old Testament have been shown from time to time, but, as in the Epistles of Paul, though to a larger extent, we find a pervading tinge of Jewish theology through the whole book. From this source are derived the awful conception of the lake of fire and brimstone; and those of the millennium, the dragon and the Beast; the imprison-

ment of Satan and the gates of pearl. From it, moreover, is borrowed the strange idea of the height of the New Jerusalem being the same as its breadth or length, and of its enormous size, which one rabbinical text assures us will be equal to that of all Palestine, while another tells us, it will reach to Damascus. The pearls of the gates, the rabbis inform us, will be thirty cubits, say forty-five feet, square, though this is nothing to pearls of which one forms a whole gate, for Eastern gates are great buildings. Nor is the rabbinical idea of the size of the city so wonderful as that of John, for, even on the lowest measurement, he makes it extend to Antioch in the distant north, and to Edessa on the Euphrates.

But, however different from Western ideas, the Apocalypse, in the providence of God, served a great end in sustaining the hearts of the sorely tried Christians of the day. Its one aim, as we have seen, was to cheer as well as warn them, by the revelation of the speedy coming of Christ, and the almost immediate humiliation and destruction of their great enemy, the Roman power. They would be avenged forthwith, by seeing terrible plagues let loose on their foes; Jerusalem, then assailed by Titus, would be delivered, by the destruction of the besiegers, and the Temple would be guarded from their violence. When Nero, the Beast, returned, it would be to burn up Rome, and leave a desolation where it had stood, while Nero, and all his supporters and hosts, would be annihilated; he himself, with his tribe of Chaldeans, magi, astrologers, diviners, enchanters, "mathematicians," jugglers, and servile parasites who, collectively, had been personified as the "False Prophet," would be hurled into the abyss. John had shown them the wonders of the upper heavens,

with its representatives of the whole body of the redeemed, in the twenty-four elders, and of all creation, in the four living creatures; had recognised that the wrongs suffered by the saints on earth were known above, by the cries from beneath the heavenly altar, and proceeds, through the whole book, to show how they were heard and awfully answered. He had told how, in the judgments to be poured out, the saints were to be protected by the seal of God on their forehead, and how they were thus, also, to be "kept, through faith, unto salvation." It had been shown how Christ, alone, could reveal the future of His people and of their enemies, by opening the sealed book of God's purposes; how the heathen were to be visited with one judgment after another, if by any means they might be led to timely repentance; how, when the Beast had fallen, and Jerusalem been delivered, Christ would descend, and, after raising the martyrs and confessors, would reign with them a thousand years in Jerusalem, Satan being bound through this happy age; how trouble would, after this, break out again, when Satan was for a season let loose; how the outlying heathen nations would be destroyed by fire from heaven, when, through Satan's instigation, they came up against the Holy City; how Satan himself was then, finally, to be cast into the abyss for ever; how the general judgment, preceded by the general resurrection, was to follow; how Death and Hades were to be sent to the burning lake; how the unworthy were to be shut up in the same dreadful prison, and how the eternal kingdom of the Messiah was to begin in a new world, canopied by new heavens; His seat of dominion being, still, Jerusalem, though, now, a new city which would come down from God out of heaven. Those who heard

its revelations read in the little Christian meetings would, therefore, know, that even if any of them should be slain for their fidelity to Christ, they would be rewarded by sharing in the first resurrection, and would, almost immediately, find themselves reigning with Christ in Jerusalem, for a thousand years, while all whose lives secured them favour at the last day, would be then admitted as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and drink of the river of the water of life, and eat the fruit of immortality, through unending ages; this amazing felicity being won for all, through the blood of the Lamb. While the Roman battering-rams were shaking the walls of the old Jerusalem, which even Christians recognised and loved as "the mother of us all"—whether Jewish Christians, Pauline Christians, or the worthies of former days,—John was enabled by the disclosures vouchsafed to him by Christ, through His angel, to point his suffering brethren to the immortal hopes shining through the darkness of the present; filling their hearts with thanksgiving, and animating them to new enthusiasm for their glorified Lord and Saviour.

I do not forget, while thus tracing the primary teaching of this wondrous book, that secondary meanings have been drawn from its chapters from age to age, in ever-changing and often opposing variety. With these, however, I have not intermeddled, though pleased to see others undertake the task of extended historical interpretation. But whatever additional views may be advanced by pious and learned study, I feel assured that the generation to which the book was immediately addressed, could only have understood its lessons as alluding to the events of their own days, and these I have sought to bring before the reader.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The fall of Jotapata, a stronghold ten miles north of Nazareth, and the capture of Josephus, the commander in Galilee, meant the final loss of the rich district from which the revolt drew its supplies, and was thus the signal for a panic at Jerusalem; now exposed to the full might of the Roman armies. But when it was learnt that the Jewish general, instead of being put to death by Vespasian, was kept by him, at Cæsarea, in only a nominal confinement, and had openly gone over to the enemy, the indignation at the aristocratic war-council which had appointed such a traitor was intense. It proved, said the Zealots, that that council were themselves traitors, for, had they not refused to recall him, in spite of the many representations of his falseness made to them? John of Gischala, his deadly enemy, now a furious leader in Jerusalem, had demanded his dismissal a hundred times; Eleazar, son of Simon, head of one faction of the Zealots, popular from his defeat of Cestius the Roman general, had offered the greedy Hannas and Joshua, the high-priests, the money taken in that rout, if they would give up their favourite; and forty thousand pieces of silver had been sent to Galilee to bribe conspirators to seize him. And now he had won the favour of Vespasian, by predicting that that enemy of Israel

would soon be emperor! The result was fatal to the moderate leaders in Jerusalem. Yet Hannas still hoped, and even made secret overtures to Vespasian, to yield up the city. But the Zealots at last resolved to have a high-priest of their own party, and caused the family of Eliakim, the only priestly house that went with them, to elect one; the choice, by lot, falling on a country Levite, Phanias. To see a peasant made the successor of Aaron infuriated the aristocratic Sadducees, who had held the great office for centuries, as their perquisite, while the Pharisees thought the leaders mad to have outraged the Law by the consecration of a mere Levite, and that, although there was already a high-priest, Matthias, appointed by Agrippa II., the lawful authority. It was the signal for civil war in the city. Collecting his supporters, Hannas drove the Zealots into the Temple, seizing the fore-courts; but, shrinking from passing the barrier which enclosed the more sacred interior, till his people had been Levitically purified, the advantage he had gained, and with it his last chance, was lost. While he delayed, the Zealots called in the wild hordes of the Idumæans, cutting through the bars of the Temple gates with the holy saws, to give them entrance; to the horror of the Pharisees. A fearful massacre now began; Hannas and Joshua, both ex-high-priests, were seized and killed: the Barbarians treading their corpses contemptuously under their feet, as I have told elsewhere, and leaving them naked on the street, to be eaten by the dogs, always prowling houseless through the town; I, myself, having, a few months since, scared three out of the carcass of a dead horse lying at the roadside, near the Damascus gate. Thus perished the murderer of St. James, dragging hun-

dreds with him to destruction. Heaps of unburied corpses lay in the streets, and wailing filled the city. The scenes described in Revelation had been realised.[1] The last remaining prominent head of the Temple aristocracy, the rich Zacharias, was presently brought before a court, forced to assemble in the Temple synagogue; where, though the judges acquitted him, two Sicarii, or dagger-men, instantly rushed on him and stabbed him to death, crying, "This is our sentence;" their comrades, meanwhile, hunting the judges out of the Temple. The Idumæans, when tired of slaughter, were finally sent off again from Jerusalem, but the Jewish factions forthwith broke out into conflict with each other. This did not last long, however, for the supporters of Eleazar ruthlessly shot down their opponents with the ballistæ and catapults they had set up in the sacred grounds, against the Romans; in reckless profanation of the Temple.

It marks the spirit of the moderate party, to find Josephus, who, like his friends, had paltered with the Romans, complaining bitterly of persons of obscure birth being put in the place of the oldest families; and that, "unclean" fruit had been eaten by the fighting men in their heavy duties; legal washings omitted; the altar-wood used for the war-machines; that "unclean" persons entered the Temple courts, and, after famine had set in, when the soldiers, in their hunger, were eating all the leather-work they could find, and mothers devouring even their own children—that the holy oil and the wine for offerings in the Temple were distributed among the starving creatures.[2]

[1] Rev. xi.

[2] *Bell. Jud.* iv. 3, 7: vii. 8, 1; v. 1, 5; vi. 2, 21; v. 13, 6.

Yet even famine was made worse by the suspicion kindled through the intrigues of the Roman party. The factions of Eleazar and John fought desperately with each other in the Temple grounds, creating such strife and tumult in the town that the citizens, in despair, called in the guerilla chief Simon, to defend them, and a regular siege of the Temple was begun. The cup of misery was now full! Not only were any Christians, still in the city, sure that the troubles of the last days had come; the abomination of desolation predicted by Daniel being now, as they believed, set up in the holy place, by the profanation of it they witnessed, but the priests pointed to the proof, in that Prophet, of these times having arrived, from the sanctuary being thus polluted, as in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.[1] The Zealots, however, believed only in the sword: that alone would bring the Messiah. Nothing remained but that those who were shocked at its profanation by the blood of men, and by the slights shown to the Law, should leave the guilty city.

Meanwhile, Vespasian profiting by the quarrels of the factions, used the winter of 67 and 68 to fortify the towns he had taken, and completed the investment of Jerusalem. In the spring, Gadara, in Peræa, fell, and thus his rear was safe. Idumæa was occupied, and secured by forts, and Jerusalem was finally isolated, and thrown on its own resources alone, by the taking of Jericho, in May 68.

Now, however, came, strangely, a breathing time for the Jews. At Cæsarea, his headquarters, Vespasian, while arranging for the final attack on the capital, was disturbed by news from Italy. Each post was more grave than its

[1] Matt. xxiv. 15; *Bell. Jud.* iv. 6, 3.

predecessor. Vindex had risen in Gaul. Then, Nero had killed himself and Galba was emperor. Vespasian could not prosecute the war without orders from his new master. But the innovation of the choice of a ruler by the legions or Prætorians was bringing on sad troubles. The Cæsars being gone, the throne of the world was made a gift of the soldiery, which meant that it would be put up to the highest bidder, and decided by the tumultuous shouts of the camp. Nero had unconsciously seen, at his audiences, seven future emperors, and the father of an eighth; Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, and the father of Trajan. Meanwhile, till this supreme question was settled, the sword must rest in its scabbard in Palestine; a pause which gave the Romans coveted rest, and set the Zealots free for still greater excesses than in the past. Everywhere the nations held their breath, as ominous, disquieting rumours stole over all lands. The circle of each horizon became a whispering-gallery of muttered hopes and fears, keeping all minds in restless outlook for they knew not what momentous and imminent issues. It was the interval of which John speaks in the Apocalypse, before the letting loose of God's judgments on mankind. The angels, to use his metaphor, stood at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds, that they should not blow on the earth, or on the sea, or on any tree; no wave rising, no leaf stirring; while another angel, ascending from the East, sealed the servants of God on their foreheads, to mark them out for protection when the final judgments began.[1] I have already sketched the great events that immediately followed the death of Nero; the spread of a report in Rome that he had fled to Egypt

[1] Rev. vii. 1, 3.

or to the Parthians, beyond the Euphrates, and would soon return. Men looked anxiously towards the great river, from the posts on which, Vespasian had withdrawn the troops, relying on Nero's treaty with Parthia. This proved, indeed, to be ended with the emperor's death; the frontiers on both sides of the Euphrates seeing border skirmishes again in full force.[1] Galba, an old honest general, soon lay murdered by the soldiers, whose license he would not encourage. Vitellius was proclaimed emperor in Germany, Otho in Rome. The unity of the empire seemed about to be broken up into rival monarchies, as that of Alexander had been; not only Jews and Christians thinking this, but even Roman provinces. A child said to have been born at Syracuse, in 68, with three heads, was held a symbol of the three emperors who rose in one year, and reigned together, for a brief moment. Otho who was proclaimed in January 69, after glorifying the memory of Nero for three months, fell by his own hand, when defeated by Vitellius, at Bedriacum in Northern Italy, at a cost of twenty-four thousand lives; leaving the ignoble victor as another phantom emperor. All this time Vespasian remained inactive at Cæsarea; he and his son Titus, watching affairs. Meanwhile, the legions in Syria felt aggrieved that those of the West should monopolise the disposing of the throne, and as Mucianus the pro-consul of Syria and, as such, commander-in-chief, would not hear of aspiring to the purple, Vespasian, a man of sixty,—plain, unambitious and honest, with no claim of nobility to aid him, found himself designated by the voice of the army, for the splendid but dangerous honour of the succession. His son Titus, twenty-eight years old,

[1] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 6 ff.

vigorously supporting him, took on himself the burden of the necessary intrigues and negotiations. The character of Vitellius was meanwhile working in favour of Vespasian, for Nero was once more honoured in every way by the new emperor; revolting the conscience of the better-minded in all the provinces. The native princes of Syria, moreover, were won to the side of Vespasian by the arts of Agrippa II., and his clever, unprincipled sister, Berenice, who, though forty years old, made a complete conquest of Titus by her blandishments, and of his father by her amiabilities and presents. Tiberius Alexander, a Jewish renegade, prefect of Egypt, also supported the movement, and even the Parthians undertook to aid it.[1]

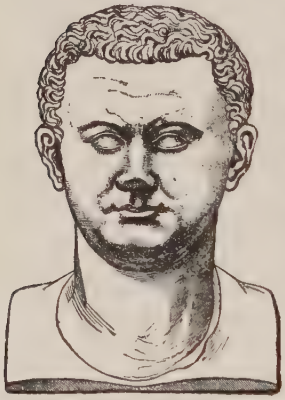
Shrewd and calm, keeping very quiet and acting loyally to each shadow emperor as he rose, Vespasian was nevertheless watching carefully each turn of affairs, and preparing himself for action at the right moment. Yet superstition played its part in his practical nature. Consulting oracles, he was told by one at Carmel, that he would reign, and he kept a "Chaldean," as consulting mystagogue, and indulged, in secret, in the black arts.[2] Erelong, the troops at Cæsarea, ever more angry at the Western legions having the naming of successive emperors, insisted on hailing their commander as "imperator"; the legions at Alexandria and Antioch having already done so.[3] Agrippa, then at Rome, heard all this, earlier than Vitellius, and hurrying back to Palestine, went, with his sister, in the train of Vespasian, to Antioch and Alexandria, to grace the assumption of the empire by him.

[1] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 82; iv. 51.
[2] Suet. *Vespas.* 25; Dio. Cass. lxvi. 1.
[3] Tac. *Hist.* ii. 9, 81; Suet. *Vespas.* 6.

Meanwhile, the reign of Vitellius came to an end, after the defeat of his army at Cremona, by the general acting for Vespasian. Wild tumults rose in Rome, during which the Capitol was burnt down; the city taken by the victor of Cremona, after bloody street battles, in which the brother of Vespasian perished, and, finally, Vitellius was put to death by the soldiery, with every circumstance of contempt, on the 20th December 69. Vespasian now took the title of Cæsar, and found himself the centre of Oriental dreams and superstitions which must have astonished the honest Roman. Jewish magi, astrologers, and "mathematicians" proclaimed him a Star in the East, ordained to be King of the Jews. Josephus, as already narrated, tells how a devil was cast out before him. The god Serapis having announced that the great man's touch would heal the blind and the lame, sightless men and deformed cripples were brought to him, and, as was asserted, were cured by his hand. The moderate among the Jews were not behind in this worship of the rising sun, but he set off for Italy in the beginning of 70, leaving Titus to complete the crushing of the rebellion in Jerusalem and Palestine.

As soon as the season permitted, Titus left Alexandria for Cæsarea, and, erelong, advanced from that town, at the head of a great army, to girdle Jerusalem in an iron ring. He had then, or soon after, six legions, of which the twelfth was noted for its hatred of the Jews, and the tenth for its splendid artillery practice—of course with ballistæ and catapults. There were, besides, many auxiliaries sent by the Syrian princes, and wild corps of Arabs, who came mainly for plunder. All the pro-Roman Jews, including Agrippa and Josephus, went with

the commander-in-chief, and the conduct of the siege operations was confided to Tiberius Alexander, another Jew. Titus pitched his camp on Mount Scopus, where Cestius had planted the standards three years before; the tenth legion set up its terrible artillery on the Mount of Olives; two others closed-in the north side of the city, a third lying as a reserve behind them. Christians who saw the array covering Scopus and all the bare hills round, must have recalled the words of our Lord, spoken on the Mount of Olives, in the last week of His life, when, as the splendour of the Temple, and the suburban mansions, and public buildings of the city burst on His sight, at the turn of the path towards it, He burst into tears and cried out in His sorrow, "If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things that belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."[1] Josephus tells us how it grieved him to see all the places familiar to him from



The Emperor Titus.
Born A.D. 41; died A.D. 81.
(*From a marble head at Porta Portese, Rome, now in the British Museum.*)

[1] Luke xix. 41–44.

childhood given up to the soldiery; how they hewed down the olive trees of Gethsemane, and the groves at the tombs of the kings, and, indeed, everything green, far and near, to the very hedges and ornamental shrubs, which were made into fascines and gabions, and how they carried off the very soil of gardens to throw on the siege mounds.[1]

Inside the city anarchy and murder reigned. Famine made all men savages, and the wild starving mob, associating with the different factions, spared neither age nor sex. To have food was death; and, indeed, life was taken for any cause or for none. No woman was safe from the rabble; confusion and tumult made the city a pandemonium. Each day saw bloody fights between rival bands, and the streets were never free from mangled corpses, for it was death to attempt to bury the victims of popular fury. Simon, son of Gioras, with about 15,000 men commanded in the upper town; John of Gischala, with his bands of organised assassins, or Sicarii, about 7000 in number, held the desecrated Temple. But a new faction, under Eleazar, son of Simon the priest, erelong seized the inner part of the sanctuary, where they maintained themselves on the consecrated bread and wine stored there, and on the provisions still brought, as first-fruits, to the priests. The constant war between these three rival forces now grew so fierce that corpses were left to rot unburied, in the holy grounds. Immense quantities of wheat had been accumulated in the Temple store-chambers, to supply food for years, if needed, but these were all burnt by John and Eleazar, between them; each hoping to preserve enough for his own faction, and

[1] *Bell. Jud.* vi. 2, 1.

starve out that of his opponent.[1] The condition of the inhabitants grew desperate, and the sober-minded, Jews though they were, banded together to seek deliverance by secretly making peace with the Romans. Escape to them, however, proved impossible; every gate being watched with eager eyes by the Irreconcilables. Yet, amidst all this misery, the spell of Jerusalem still brought a stream of pilgrims to it from all lands; for it was the Passover season: both John and Eleazar giving them welcome, since they profited by their offerings, and even gained supporters from among them. Indeed, the Messianic prophecies had filled the Jews, everywhere, with such an assurance of final victory, that soldiers deserted even from the heathen legions, and made their way into the city which was to be aided from heaven and to rule the world.[2] Meanwhile, numbers of worshippers were killed while at the altar with their sacrifices; the ministering priests and they falling together, under the arrows of John, or the stones from his machines. Messengers, moreover, were sent beyond the Euphrates, to the Parthians and other powers, for it was fancied that the whole East would send its Jews to the rescue of the city of Jehovah, and the princes were supposed to need only a hint, themselves to come to its help against the Roman: for, like the Christians, the Jews believed that the empire was breaking up, and would soon become a number of weak rival kingdoms. Fanatics stalked through the narrow streets, calling on the four winds to destroy it. To the last, the mob shouted out the glories of Jerusalem as the future metropolis of the world.

[1] *Bell. Jud.* v. 1, 4; Tac. *Hist.* v. 42. It is also mentioned repeatedly in the Talmud.

[2] Suet. *Vespas.* 4.

Meanwhile things advanced at first faster than Titus had hoped, for the outer wall, very recently built, fell before the blows of his great battering-ram, the Conqueror, fifteen days after the opening of the siege on the 23rd of April, and the second was breached and stormed a few days later. To deepen the effect on the Jews, Titus now held a grand review on the surrounding girdle of heights, which were covered with endless masses of glittering helmets and shields. This failing to awe the defenders, Josephus was sent to a place, as safe as might be from darts and stones, to harangue the people who crowded the top of the third wall, on the religious duty of submission, but his ingenious oratory was useless: every bow being levelled at the traitor, and every machine hurling stones at him. Nor was he more successful when forced, later on, to repeat more than once, this hateful and dangerous mission; a stone finally striking him on the head and almost killing him, to the great joy of the Jews, and even to the satisfaction of his mother; then a prisoner in the city.

Those who have seen Jerusalem at Easter can imagine the almost incredible number of people who could crowd themselves into the small space of the old city at the Passover. It seemed as if the nation had gathered from all the earth, that it might be slaughtered together. How varied the lands represented by the swarming pilgrims were, is seen by the countries named in Acts, as having sent their quota to the feast.[1] That the city did not surrender, was due to its defensive strength. The Temple itself was a fortress. The castles of Herod, the fortress Antonia, the Upper City, now known as Zion, and Acra, in the north

[1] Acts ii. 9–11.

centre of the town, were so many strongholds, and the fighting men, recruited hugely by the pilgrims, were almost numberless. Nor did this immense garrison yet suffer from hunger like the rest of the population, for they seized all the food discovered. Yet the chance of successful resistance would have been seen to be hopeless, had they not been as fanatical as the modern dervishes, who believe that the Prophet will assuredly give them victory. The walls had been built of huge stones, like some still seen in those of the Baalbek temples, or in the foundations of that of Jerusalem; stones which were the wonder of the men even of that day;[1] yet the terrible battering-rams had shaken down two walls already,—that of Agrippa and that of Acra,—and the Romans now held both the south and north of the city. But a severe wound received by Titus from a Jewish stone-machine, filled the population with insane confidence, while it exasperated the Romans, envenomed their fierceness, and prolonged their resistance.

Harsher measures, which Vespasian had told his son were needed with such foes, who, he said, mistook gentleness for timidity, were ordered. All prisoners were henceforth crucified; 500 being sometimes nailed up on one day, so that, erelong, there was neither room for the crosses, nor wood of which to make them. At last, in the beginning of July, the strong castle Antonia fell, and the Temple grounds, on the north-west angle of which it stood, were open to the Romans; leaving the Temple itself apparently indefensible. But the Jews were far from this opinion. All the horrors of the preceding weeks had not shaken their confidence in the speedy appearance of Jehovah, to

[1] Mark xiii. 1.

blast the foe with His lightnings. Great part of the city lay in ruins; thousands of corpses poisoned the air; famine crept from house to house. Many had given their all for a bushel of grain; cannibalism was extending. The crucified wretches mouldered outside before all eyes, on thousands of crosses, and heaps of those who had escaped from the town, to beg for life from the enemy, lay, everywhere, cut open by the Arab auxiliaries of Titus, to get the precious stones or coin they were supposed to have swallowed. But no one dreamed that, though all this and more had been permitted, Jehovah would let His Temple perish or even be taken, by the heathen.

Ferocity grew on both sides. At the end of May the Jews, ever increasing in audacity, rushed out and managed to burn the war-engines of the Romans, and to attack their camp itself. It seemed as if Jerusalem could not be won; and that the Jews were right in thinking their God fought for it. But Titus was in no mood to be beaten. If he could not carry it by assault, he would blockade it by a wall, within which it must yield to hunger. The whole army therefore was forthwith set to build one, and so intense was the hatred felt to the Jews, and so burning the determination to conquer, that it was finished in three days. Legion vied with legion, cohort with cohort: Titus stimulating their zeal by making the round of the works several times each day.

Hitherto, the gardens of Bethlehem and other places had supplied vegetables to the citizens, but now every source of help was cut off. The Irreconcilables, however, still had enough food, and cared nothing for the sufferings around them. All houses were searched for hidden grain

or other sustenance; torture being freely used to enforce disclosure. Any one in comparatively good condition was assumed to have some food to yield up. Amidst all this robbery and plunder, anything and everything was greedily eaten by the population at large, and this starvation and gross support spread the most frightful maladies among the feeble, fever-stricken, crowded masses. Hunger, rage, despair, madness reigned, yet they never doubted that God would, in the end, appear, to save His Temple.[1] Self-styled prophets announced that He would presently come down from heaven, to rescue His beloved city, and such was the confidence that He would do so, that numbers who could have escaped, waited in Jerusalem, to see the miracle. Any one supposed to recommend capitulation was forthwith killed; Matthias, the high-priest who had brought Simon into the town, perishing, among others, on this charge, by that brigand's orders; his three sons, being killed before their father's eyes, to strike greater terror into the multitude. Meetings were prohibited; to weep together was a crime.

Wearying to be at Rome, and there enjoy the new imperial honours of his father, Titus pressed on the siege. New "mounds" were raised, in preparation for storming; the gardens for twelve miles round being stripped of all their trees to supply timber for towers raised upon them by the besiegers. An attempt made in July, to repeat the triumph of May, by burning down these, totally failed, and from that moment the fate of the city was felt to be sealed. The Romans now began to level Antonia, that free access might be had to the Temple, but the Jews built a new wall between the sanctuary and its assailants,

[1] Enoch cxiii. 7.

and the Temple grounds were thus turned into a battle-field, which was soon wet with blood from both sides; the splendid porch reaching from Antonia south, being, first of all, destroyed; each combatant levelling a part.

On the second August, the most powerful machines had been dragged into position, and began to batter the walls of the Court of the Israelites, which lay between Antonia and the Temple proper, but the effect was imperceptible. Yet the Jews were alarmed by the approach of the day on which the Temple of Solomon had been burnt by the Chaldeans; dreading that it might see theirs also perish. Still, day after day passed and the Temple still stood! But the joy was short. On the eighth of August, a day before the ominous catastrophe of the former sanctuary, the Romans succeeded in setting fire to the gates of the Men's Court. The Jews were stupefied. They could not realise that the sacred house could have been so imperilled. Titus, besought by all the Jews round him to spare it, and, no doubt anxious to preserve such a memorial of his victory, ordered the flames to be extinguished, and they were so, next day.

But the words of Christ were to come true. The ninth day of Ab, which is nearly our August, is the day on which the Jews still bewail the burning of the first Temple, and it passed without a fresh conflagration. On the tenth, however, the Jews furiously attacked the Romans in the Temple grounds, only to be driven back, and Titus, leaving a detachment behind, in the Temple courts already taken, to protect the sacred building from incendiarism, withdrew to Antonia, to prepare for a final assault next day. But the Jews were furious at the sight of the heathen guarding the smouldering embers of the late fire,

and rushed out on them, to be presently hurled back, and pursued by the legionaries to the very Temple buildings. The irritation of men so ferociously opposed was beyond restraint. Without an order, a soldier, mounting on the shoulders of a comrade, threw a burning brand into the Temple itself, through what was known as the "golden window," facing the grand royal porch, or arcade, which ran along the south side of the Temple area. The flame caught presently, and the smoke announced that the Romans, like the Chaldeans, had set the very house of God on fire! A wild cry of despair rose from all the city, and from the fanatics still in the Temple courts. Leaving their posts, their one thought was to save their sanctuary. Titus would fain have had the splendid trophy spared, but the fury of his soldiers made it impossible to preserve it. As the Jews fought to defend it, the Romans, who had pressed on, fought bitterly to drive them back. Fresh brands flew over the heads of the combatants. Heaps of corpses lay on the Temple steps, when Titus reached the blazing pile, but while he was giving orders to save it, a soldier put fire under the doors of the Holy Place, which was instantly in flames; the dry cedar and the hangings, needing only a spark to burst into tongues of flame.

A great heart-rending cry rose from every part of the city, so far as it yet stood, at the sight of the smoke-clouds rolling up from the burning Temple, but the struggle round the furious conflagration was as fierce as ever. A frightful carnage marked the site of the great altar, before the fast vanishing Holy Place. Its top—about seventy-five feet square,—crowded, ever afresh, with new combatants, was as constantly swept clear, only

to be thronged again with new victims, mad with fanatical excitement; their great black eyes flashing fury, their long black hair streaming in the wind, their white teeth gnashing with vain rage, their excited dark faces and pale lips quivering with excitement, as they cried wildly on God to stand by His people and His house! But though they fought with the frenzy of despair, it was only to be swept off in heaps down the altar slope. The blood of men flowed, on all sides, in streams, instead of that of bulls and goats; the survivors being still more frenzied by the shrieks of the dying! But now one hall after another was taken by the Romans; the soldiers pressing steadily forwards, over the smoking ruins. The Jews still held the road to the upper town, across the Tyropœan ravine, but they refused, as yet, to flee. Some priests who had managed to gain the roof of the burning Temple, tore off its gilded metal-work, put up to prevent birds from alighting on the sacred building, and hurled the pieces, with the leaden sockets in which they were imbedded, on the legionaries below. All fear of death seemed lost. Many sought it, that they and the sanctuary might perish together. Not a few rushed on the short swords of the Romans; numbers killed themselves, and numbers killed each other. At last the Romans got to the eastern halls. There, a self-styled prophet had gathered over six thousand men, and great numbers of women and children, proclaiming that this was the time when the Messiah was at last to appear. But instead of this, the Romans irresistibly advanced over the fore-courts, and set fire to the retreat of these unfortunates, shutting them in, to die in the flames. Yet their wild fanaticism was immeasurably nobler than the hollow flattery in which Josephus

afterwards stooped to say, that the words of the Prophets referred to Vespasian, and that the expected Messiah was no other than himself.[1] The Divine Promise seemed to have been a mockery, when those still alive saw the heathen standard, surmounted by the hated bust of the emperor and the Roman eagle, planted where the Temple had stood, and the shouts of the soldiers rose over the ruins, proclaiming Titus "Imperator"—the man who had laid the Temple in ashes. When "the abomination of desolation" thus stood before them in the holy place, and the roar of triumph drowned the cries of the dying, the courage of the Jews at last gave way. The "Upper City," forming the south-western quarter of Jerusalem, lay on what is now called Zion,—a rounded hump of limestone, steep on the west, south, and east sides, and reached by bridges from the Temple grounds,—was still untaken, and, as the strongest part of the town, after the Temple, was capable of offering a prolonged resistance. John of Gischala, Simon Gioras, and a great body of fighting men, succeeded in cutting their way to it, and established themselves in the strongly-fortified palace of Herod, which stood within great walls, under the shadow of his three immensely strong castles. To obtain possession of this huge fortress the Romans had to heap up mounds on the west side of the hill, from the depth of the valley, before they could bring their battering-rams to bear on the walls; a task which consumed eighteen days, though thousands of men toiled at the work continuously. Meanwhile, Titus systematically laid in ruins each part of the town as it came into his power. The houses on Ophel, the old Hill of Zion, once the city of David, on the rough

[1] *Bell. Jud.* vi. 5, 6.

slopes south of the Temple, were burned down. The Lower Town, which filled the hundred-feet-deep valley below the west Temple wall, was destroyed as ruthlessly; the wreck of the Temple courts and buildings, of the bridges, and of the thickly-packed houses, filling up the whole valley, so that its very existence has only been proved by the excavations of the last few years. Mounds of smoking ruins were, erelong, all that remained of Jerusalem. The streets, as known to our Lord, lay buried under many feet of rubbish.

The wails of the "Lamentations" over the Jerusalem destroyed by the Chaldeans were still more true of that over which Rome had triumphed. Jehovah had covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger. He had cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel. He had swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob; He had thrown down, in His wrath, the strongholds of the daughter of Judah. He had burned up Jacob like a flaming fire; He had become an enemy; He had swallowed up Israel. Her gates were sunk into the ground. The women had eaten the children they dandled in their arms. The priest and the prophet lay slain in the sanctuary of the Lord. The youth and the old man lay on the ground in the streets; the virgins and young men had fallen by the sword. Men's faces were black like an oven, because of the burning heat of famine. The mountain of Zion lay desolate; the jackals walked over it.[1]

Numbers of the richer classes, however, managed to escape capture, but vast crowds, of all conditions, especially of the poor, were taken prisoners, to be sold as slaves; the market being so glutted with these unfortunates, of whom nearly 100,000 were thrown on it at once, that their price

[1] Lamentations, *passim*.

fell to the merest trifle.[1] But they had their revenge, for the race was thus spread more than ever, over Italy and round the Mediterranean, to cherish deadly hatred and win countless proselytes, through whose children and their own they were hereafter to wreak terrible vengeance, under Trajan and Hadrian, on the Roman populations. The robes of the high-priests, the precious stones, the holy tables, the cups, the candelabra, and the hangings, were saved by order of Titus, to be paraded at his designed triumph at Rome.

But the Upper City was still held by the desperate thousands who had escaped from the capture and destruction of the Temple and all the other portions of Jerusalem. When, however, the mounds for the engines to attack this last stronghold were finished, the battering rams were pushed up to its walls, and began their deadly work with such vigour that, before long, part of them had fallen. Famine, fever, and bitter disappointment had made the defenders only the ghosts of men; too feeble and too broken-hearted to continue the strenuous resistance of the past. Many of them, indeed, gave in, and surrendered; even priests stealing out of their hiding-places, with some of the holy vessels, to offer them as a possible ransom of their lives. Faith in the future of the nation was for the moment gone. Simon and John were both taken; their attempts to hide in subterranean passages having failed. The Upper City was, thus, speedily mastered; to be razed to the ground, forthwith; only the barracks, and Herod's towers being spared, for quarters to the tenth legion, which was told off as a permanent garrison, over the ruins, to prevent any attempt at rebuilding.

[1] *Bell. Jud.* vi. 9, 87.

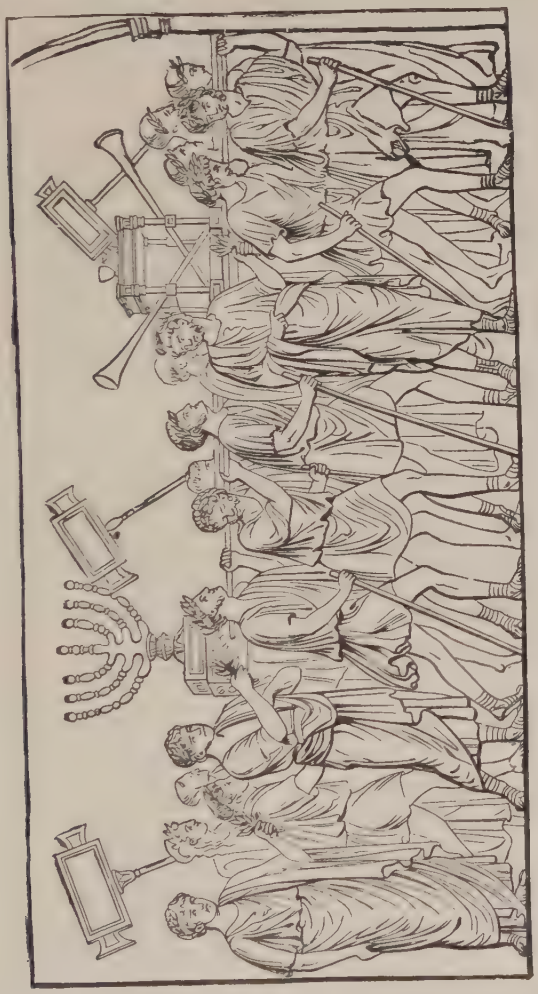
On the 8th September, A.D. 70, all resistance ceased. The houses destroyed had been full of corpses, and, now, all those who were unable to march with the troops were remorselessly put to death. The fate of the survivors was awful. Driven with cruel violence into a vast herd, by the soldiers, they were finally separated into classes,—to fight as gladiators in the theatres of the great provincial towns,—butchered to make a Roman holiday. Marcus Aurelius speaks of wretches half-devoured by wild beasts in the arena at Rome, begging hard to be put back, though they knew they would have to face the same beasts to-morrow, and so, we are told, it was, now, in the amphitheatres of many provincial cities, favoured by public spectacles of Jewish captives exposed to death in every form, for the amusement of the populace. Stretched on the rack, burnt, scourged, crucified, half-torn by wild beasts, and then taken away and kept for a second encounter, their agonies served as an inexhaustible entertainment to the heathen, especially at Beyrout, in the presence of Titus, to celebrate his birthday.[1] All above seventeen were sent off, with fetters on their legs, to fight in the amphitheatres, with wild beasts, or with each other, or to toil as slaves of the State, in Egypt, on public works. Those under seventeen were sold in the slave markets to any buyer. The sorting out of the prisoners took several days, during which thousands died; some from hunger; no food being given them: others from refusing to accept any. The next weeks were employed in demolishing what remained of the city, in throwing down the walls, and in searching the sewers and underground passages for fugitives in hiding. In

[1] *Bell. Jud.* vii. 3, 1; 8, 7.

these dark retreats great amounts of money and other wealth were discovered, and also many insurgents, who were at once killed. More than 2000 corpses were found in them and also some prisoners, captured by the Irreconcilables. John of Gischala, compelled by hunger to come out, was condemned to perpetual imprisonment. Simon, son of Gioras, having a supply of food, was able to hide till October. Clad in a white robe, with a purple mantle over it, he then stole out of the subways at a spot near the Temple site; thinking to frighten the soldiers by passing for a ghost, or perhaps for the Messiah. But he was at once seized and taken to the commanding officer, to be set apart, presently, for transport to Rome, as one of the leading captives in the triumph of Titus. But this was only the beginning of his miseries, for as the great procession of the conqueror passed the Mamertine prison, under the Capitol, he was led away to a contemptuous death, by being thrown down from the top of the Tarpeian Rock. By the end of September Jerusalem had disappeared, excepting the towers of Herod, and the barracks, and it lay thus in great mounds of ruin till Hadrian rebuilt it, as Ælia Capitolina, about the year 122.

While the whole empire was rejoicing at the victory of Titus, the conqueror forgot, in the arms of the frail Berenice, the awful scenes he had witnessed, till his longing to show himself in Rome, and enjoy the glory of a triumph, drove him thither. There, the spectacle was worthy at once of the greatness of the empire and the brutality of the age. Medals were struck: the great arch that bears the name of the conqueror rose as a commemoration of his victory, and still gives us a glimpse

of one portion of the great procession which intoxicated



The Spoils of the Temple carried in the Triumph of Titus
(*from the Arch of Titus*).

Rome with its variety and splendour. Endless ranks of

laurelled veterans of every province of the Roman world, from the fair Briton to the swarthy Arab, and as contrasted in arms and dress, marched amidst the strains of music and loud trumpet flourishes, through the narrow, crowded streets, towards the Capitol. Guarded by the soldiery, the prisoners of Jerusalem and Palestine followed, in countless weary files. Painted banners, borne aloft, displayed the chief incidents of the war, and a personification of the Jordan as a river-god, looked down from

Medal commemorating the taking of Jerusalem.

above the shoulders of its bearers. Then came the spoil, and, as part of it, the holy furniture, and the adornments and vessels of the Temple; the table of shewbread, the seven-branched candlestick, and the sacred rolls of the Law, as we see them still, carved on the triumphal arch. Behind this spoil of the sanctuary, Roman youths bore proudly the image of the god of Victory, who, as they fancied, had so gloriously honoured the Roman arms, and then, amidst a blaze of military splendour, came Titus. The pageant stopped at the temple of Jupiter

Capitolinus till word came that sentence had been carried out on Simon ben Gioras. And thus, with immeasurable pomp and rejoicing of the heathen, were celebrated the funeral rites of the Jewish State. The spoil of the Temple was, at a later time, placed by Vespasian in a temple built by him to Peace; the curtain that had hung before the Holy of Holies, and the rolls of the Law taken from that sacred chamber, being, however, brought to Vespasian's palace.

So passed away the dream of centuries. Not Rome

Coin of Vespasian commemorating the conquest of Judæa.

but Jerusalem had perished; the "horns of the Beast," the proconsuls of the empire, had remained subordinate, and the power of the world-city, under the Flavian house and its successors, had yet centuries to run. Nor had it even attained its full splendour, for its greatest glory was to come, generations later, under the Antonines. The reign of Christ in Jerusalem, during a thousand years, over the saints and martyrs raised from the grave to surround Him, receded into an unknown future, and Gog and Magog remained still hostile to the Cross.

It was reckoned that over 900,000 prisoners had been taken in Galilee and Judæa, and that over a million had

been killed in Jerusalem and elsewhere but theirs had been the happier fate. There was no prophet-poet now,

Arch of Titus.

to see Rachel, descended from the heavens, or come up from the grave, weeping for her children on the bare

hills of Benjamin, for their fair city had perished from the earth, and her land was silent and desolate; her sons slain or led off to shameful slavery, or to make sport in heathen amphitheatres, by mortal combat with each other or with wild beasts; her daughters delivered over to disgrace at the hands of the soldiery, or from the steps of the slave market. They had put away from them the things of their peace which Jesus had offered them, and His blood had only too truly come back on those who had pierced Him, and on their children.

The temple of Peace, built by Vespasian, and made the treasure-house of the spoils of the Temple, was burned down little more than a century later, under Commodus, but it is maintained that these priceless relics were saved from the conflagration. An unreliable tradition reports that the golden candlestick was lost in the Tiber when Maxentius, defeated by Constantine, was trying to cross the Milvian Bridge, but another legend tells us that it and the other Hebrew treasures, were carried off by Genseric the Vandal, to Africa, though it is also alleged that they were taken to France by Alaric, and being found by the Emperor Theodoric, were brought back to Ravenna. But the Genseric tradition is supplemented by the statement that Belisarius recovered what the Vandal had taken to Africa, and sent it to Constantinople, from which, Gibbon tells us, they were said to have been carried to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. This is all that even rumour has to tell, so that we may only too confidently assume that these last remembrances of the city of Christ's day have perished.[1]

[1] A great deal of information on this and other related subjects will be found in "The Arch of Titus," by the Rev. W. Knight, M.A.

CHAPTER XVIII

ST. JOHN'S EPISTLES

THE testimony of antiquity stamps the First Epistle of John as a sacred legacy from the beloved disciple, and in the face of the identity in style, expression, and modes of thought, characterising his Gospel and this echo of its tone and spirit, the fanciful suggestion of some modern critics that it is only an abstract of the fourth Gospel, by some unknown writer, is not worthy of serious notice. Every verse bears the stamp of apostolic authority, nor is it any objection that there is no introductory or closing salutation, since this marks the Epistle to the Hebrews also, while the absence of such a farewell at its close is found in the Epistle of St. James. To whom it was addressed, may be decided from the undoubted residence of St. John in Asia Minor, after the death of St. Paul, while the evidence in the Epistle to the Colossians, that heresy of the Gnostic type, had early shown itself in the region of that province in which John resided, leaves little ground for doubt that he now wrote to the churches in it, to guard them, as a whole, from the false teaching that assailed them. We may therefore, with no serious hesitation, assume that it was sent to them from Ephesus, John's headquarters. That it was written in the later apostolic time is certain, for its whole tone speaks of an old man as its author, while the errors it denounces are

those of later growth, and there is no longer such dispute respecting Jewish and Pauline converts as marks an earlier day. When it was written has been variously conjectured by different critics, but in the uncertainty as to the exact time, it seems, on all grounds, most probable, that it dates from some time after the fall of Jerusalem, but before the close of the first century; the extreme age to which John survived, leaving the exact time of its composition impossible to decide.

The First Epistle General of John.

I. 1. That **manifestation of God** which was from the beginning—that which we have heard **from Himself**—that which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled—2. concerning the Word of Life — **Jesus Christ, Himself the Life**—for **in Him** "The Life" was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you The Life—the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us, **men**;—3. that which we have seen and heard **concerning Him** declare we to you also, that you also may have fellowship **in Him**, with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ:—4. and, **on this account do we write** that your joy may be filled to the full, **through this common relation of Sonship to God.**

5. And this is the **sum of the** message which we have heard from Him—**the Son of God, manifest in the flesh**, and which we make known to you,—that God is light—**absolute holiness and truth**, and in Him is no darkness at all—**no sin; no untruth.**[1]

He only who does not walk in darkness, has fellowship, or communion with God.

6. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and **yet walk in** the darkness,[2] we lie, **for fellowship**, or spiritual one-

[1] **John i. 4, 5, 8–10; James i. 18, 17.** [2] **John viii**

ness with God, which is the soul of all truly Christian life, is incompatible with any inner contradiction like that, and we do not the truth—that which is in harmony with the nature and will of God:[1] 7. but if we walk in the light, as He, God, is in the light, as His element, we have fellowship, in the true sense, one with another, as like with like, and only through this fellowship of "the children of light"[2] can we find forgiveness of sin and rescue from its power, and find that the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin,[3] and makes us pure as God is pure.[4] 8. But this implies the presence of sin and the consciousness of its presence, even among believers, so that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth—the realisation of it which comes from self-examination and self-knowledge—is not in us.[5] 9. But, on the other hand, if we penitently confess our sins, frankly and openly, one to another,[6] He, God, is faithful to His promise and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. Indeed, if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, since He has taken pity on us as sinners, and His word, which promises and brings forgiveness of sin, is not in us, but we are like those of the Gnostic schools, who maintain that they are sinless, and cannot sin.

Sinlessness is not presupposed in Christians, but is the aim and end of all Christian teaching.

II. 1. Therefore my little children, I write these things to you, that you may not sin. And if any man among you, in spite of his knowing better, should sin, and truly repents,[7] we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; for only righteousness can plead for unrighteousness:[8] 2. and

[1] John iii. 21; 2 Cor. vi. 14; Eph. v. 8. [2] John xii. 36.
[3] Heb. ix. 13, 14. [4] Matt. v. 48; 1 Pet. i. 18.
[5] John viii. 31–34; ix. 41. [6] James v. 16.
[7] Gal. vi. 1.; Rom. vii. 15 ff.
[8] James v. 16; Rom. viii. 34; Heb. ix. 24.

He is able to do this, for He is the propitiation, or expiation, for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.[1]

Walking in light is walking in love.

3. And hereby we know that we truly know Him, God, if we keep His commandments: failing to do which we have only a false Gnostic intellectual apprehension of Him. 4. He, therefore, that says, "I know Him," and yet does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him: 5. but he who keeps His word, in him, assuredly, the love of God,—that is due to God, has been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6. he that says he abideth in Him, God, ought himself also to walk even as He, Christ, walked, who abode in His Father's love.[2]

7. Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you,[3] but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning of your Christian life; the "old commandment" is the word which ye have heard from the apostles—the commandment of Love, which is as old as Christianity. 8. But now, looking at it from another side, I may say, that I write, again, a new commandment to you, which new aspect of the old command is true in respect to Him and dwells in you; because the darkness, the state of sin and blindness, is passing away from the world, and the true light already shines. 9. He who, poisoned by the false idea that, as a Gnostic, he has the germ of true light or knowledge, and says that he is in the light, and, in his pride of this, hates his fellow-Christian, is still, to this time, in the darkness. 10. But, on the other hand, he that loves his fellow-Christian dwells abidingly in the light, and there is no ground of stumbling in his case, for love keeps him from falling, and shaming the faith. 11. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness of sin, and knows not whither he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

[1] John i. 29. [2] John xv. 10. [3] John xiii. 34.

12. I write to you, my little children, who though Christians, have not attained the ripeness of Christian manhood as yet, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake, as your Advocate and propitiation. 13. I write to you, fathers, because ye know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, little children, because ye know the Father. 14. I have written, I say, to you, fathers, because ye, as becomes men come to thoughtful years, know Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you, who have to serve in active Christian life, are strong, and the word of God, the source of strength, abideth in you, and, thus prepared for doing so, ye have overcome the evil one. 15. And now I say to you all, love not the world—love of which is the opposite of the love God requires—neither the things that are in the world, which attract the "natural man." For if any man love the world, otherwise than as God loves it, the love of the Father is not in him. 16. For the child of God can only love what has its source in God; but all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, fond of the luxury and the hateful pleasures of the day—and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17. And, yet, the world passes away, and that which men of the world lust after; but he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Warning against the enemies of Christianity — the Antichrist—whose appearance shows that the last hour of the present state of things has come.

18. Little children, it is the last hour! and as ye have often heard from us that Antichrist comes, so, even now, many antichrists have arisen; from which we know that the world is ripe for judgment, and therefore that it is the last hour before that comes!

The distinctive title of Antichrist is not assigned, in

these words, to any individual, but the existence of many who, as false teachers, carry out the aim of Antichrist, by seeking to pervert the Truth, is used as a sign that he is at hand. This is closely in keeping with St. Paul's language, that "the man of sin, the son of perdition," would speedily follow "the falling away" which he foresaw.[1] The Jews expected a Messiah of their own,[2] and, as we have seen, the apostles expected Antichrist in the form of heathen Rome under its emperor, as the instrument of Satan—"the dragon," and "old serpent."

These false teachers, or Antichrists, had been actually amongst the brotherhood, as members of it, but had separated from them when John was writing his epistle.

19. They went out from us,[3] **to set up new Gnostic schools, in addition to those already in vogue, outside the churches;** for if they had been **really** of us, **as true believers,** they would have continued with us, but **they went out** that it might be clearly shown that they all—**as a body**—were not of us.[4]

As to those to whom the apostle writes, he bears witness that they know the truth.

20. And **ye know this, for** ye have an anointing from the Holy One, **the Holy Spirit, consecrating you as believers, as kings and priests were consecrated by the anointing oil,** and ye know all things **respecting the truth. Those who have left you pose as alone enjoying secret and deep knowledge of divine things, and spiritual illumination, but you have both; they have neither.** 21. I have not, **therefore,** written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do **know it, and, hence, must know** that no lie is of the truth.

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 3 ff.
[2] John v. 43; Matt. xxiv. 23, 24.
[3] Acts xx. 30.
[4] 1 Cor. xi. 19.

He now gives them more definite signs of Antichristian lies.

22. Who is the liar I mean, when I speak thus, but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He who acknowledges Jesus simply as a man, and not, also, as, in truth, the Christ, the Sent of God, and His Anointed and exclusive Revealer, impugns the fundamental articles of the faith, and, hence, this person is the antichrist and liar, who denies in this way both the Father and the Son; 23. for whosoever denies the Son has not the Father, that is, neither knows nor honours Him: but he who confesses that Jesus is the Son, by accepting Him as the Christ, has the Father also. 24. As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning; for if that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father, and inherit the promise. 25. And this is the promise which He, Christ, promised us, even the life eternal.

Close of the notice of the Antichrist.

26. These things have I written to you concerning them that would lead you astray. 27. As to yourselves, the anointing which ye received of Him—the Holy Spirit—abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you what is the truth; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things[1] and is true, and is no lie: and I rejoice to say, even as it, His anointing, taught you, ye do abide in him, the Holy Spirit.

Christians are pledged to righteousness, by which they show that they are sons of God; not children of the evil one.

28. And now, my little children, see that ye abide in Him; that if, as indeed, is the case, He, Christ, shall be manifested ye may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. And to make this sure—29. if ye know, as ye do, that He is righteous, ye know that every one also, that doeth righteousness, and such an one only, is begotten of Him.

[1] John xiv. 26; xvi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 12; xii. 8–11.

III. 1. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and yet such we are. Therefore the world, hating God and knowing nothing of Him, does not know us as His sons, because it did not know Him, even when revealed in Jesus Christ, the Divine Son.[1] 2. Yet, beloved, even now, amidst all our lowliness and troubles, we are, indeed, children of God, and it is not yet made fully manifest, what we shall be; but we know that, if He be manifested, as we know He shall be, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him, who even on earth displayed the glory of God, even as He then is, in His heavenly glory;[2] for as those see Him who are like Him,[3] our being so, in part, here, will ensure our being made wholly so there. 3. Such an exceeding and eternal weight of glory awaiting the children of God, every one who has this hope resting upon him, purifies himself, even as He, Christ, is pure,[4] as becomes pilgrims to the heavenly city; for even pilgrims to the city of God on earth must be pure to be allowed to approach Him. 4. Every one who fails to do this, on the contrary, commits sin, and breaks God's law, for sin is rebellion against it. Those therefore who teach that Christians may do what conscience proclaims wrong, are rebels against God, and the so-called higher knowledge on which they ground their acting thus is a lie.[5] 5. And, further, ye know, in your own experience, that He was manifested to take away sins; and that in Him is no sin. 6. Therefore whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: and whosoever sinneth has not seen Him, neither knoweth Him.

This distortion of the truth by apologising for sin was the most dangerous side of the false teaching prevalent, and therefore they are specially warned against it.

7. My little children, let no man lead you astray in this;

[1] John xv. 18, 19; xiv. 17; xv. 21–24; xvi. 3. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [3] 1 Cor. xiii. 12; Rev. xxii. 4; Matt. v. 8. [4] John xv. 2, 3; xvii. 17; 2 Cor. vi. 17; vii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 13, 14. [5] 1 John ii. 21, 27.

he only who practises, and not merely talks of, righteousness, is righteous, in the true sense, that is, as He, Christ, is righteous; 8. but he that practises sin is of the devil: for the devil sinneth from the beginning. Indeed, to this end was Jesus, the Son of God, manifested—that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9. Whosoever, therefore, is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His, God's, seed, His creative spiritual power, the germ of life, abideth in Him: and He cannot willingly sin, because He is begotten of God. 10. Hence, in this the children of God are manifest, as by a sure mark, and so are the children of the devil: whosoever, therefore, doeth not righteousness is not of God, nor, to speak more closely, is he that loveth not his brother.

Of true brotherly love between Christians.

11. For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;[1] 12. not being, like Cain, who was a son of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.[2] The opposite source of their spiritual birth estranged even natural brothers; but the spiritual birth of Christians, from above, unites even strangers, in true love.

13. Hence, marvel not, brethren, if the world hate you,[3] for Cain is the type of it. 14. But we know that we do not belong to it, but have passed out of the death in which we lay while we did so into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not, abideth still in spiritual death. 15. For whosoever hateth his brother is, like Cain, a murderer: and ye know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16. For we know what love is, through this, that he, Christ, laid down His life for us: and so, instead of entertaining hate, which might take a brother's life, we ought, rather, to lay down our own lives for the brethren. 17. But do you all act up to this ideal? Alas, some come short

[1] John xv. 12; Rom. xiii. 8, 10; Gal. v. 14; Col. iii. 14.
[2] John viii. 39, 41, 44. [3] John xv. 18, 19.

even in small proofs of brotherly love. But whoso has the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18. My little children, let us not love in word only, neither with the tongue only; but in deed and truth.

True brotherly love is born of the true Faith, and the confession of it.

19. If, therefore, we purify ourselves from hate and all other sin, even as Christ is pure,[1] hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart of pardon through our Advocate. Christ, for the sins on account of which it condemns us, when we examine ourselves before Him; 20. because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things—Christ's intercession, as well as our offence. 21. If, on the other hand, beloved, our heart condemn us not, we have boldness towards God; 22. and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23. And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment. 24. And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit, which He gave us.

Renewed warning against the false teachers.

IV. 1. Beloved, believe not every spirit claiming to be that of a prophet or teacher, but prove the spirits,[2] by the rules established among us, whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out, from the churches, into the world. 2. To help you in this, I give you a special mark of a false prophet. Hereby know ye whether a man speaks by the Spirit of God: every spirit speaking through a teacher, which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; contrary to

[1] John iii. 3.

[2] 1 Cor. xii. 10; xiv. 29; 1 Thess. v. 21; Matt. vii. 15; xxiv. 11, 24.

those who, now, teach that the divine Saviour was only outwardly and temporarily united to the man Jesus, thus making Him as our Saviour, only a phantom or illusion,—is of God: 3. and, in the same way, every spirit speaking through a "prophet" which confesseth not Jesus, as we confess Him, is not of God: and, indeed, this is the spirit—the essence—of the Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and as these prove is actually in the world already. 4. But ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them—these false prophets, and have driven them out from among you; because He who is in you is greater than he, Satan, that is in the world.[1] 5. They are of the world, the sphere of all that is against God, and thus the home and scene of action of these false teachers: and therefore they speak as of the world, and the world—the children of evil, hears them. 6. But we apostles, and those we send forth, are of God, and therefore he that knows God hears us, because he is of God; but he that is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

A further sign of our being of God.

7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, as its source, and therefore every one who truly loves his brother is begotten of God and knows God. 8. This, indeed, is the mark of true knowledge, in contrast to that of your Gnostic troublers, which is knowledge falsely so called,[2] and hence he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love,—not mere light, and spirit, as the Gnostics tell you. 9. And that it is so, is clear, for herein was that love of God, that is the essence of His nature, manifested in us and to us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we who were dead in trespasses and sin might live through Him. 10. That love did not spring from us to Him, but flowed, free and spontaneous, from Him to us, is no less clear, for herein is the very soul of love; not that we loved God, but that He

[1] John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11. [2] 1 Tim. vi. 20; 1 Cor. viii. 1–8.

loved us while we were His enemies,[1] and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought, also, to love one another. 12. But love towards God cannot directly reach Him, its object, for no man has seen God at any time, and, thus, to love our neighbour, as His child, is the only way in which we can practically show our love to Him, and, hence, if we love one another, God abideth in us, and the love of Him is perfected in us. 13. Hereby, moreover, we know that we thus abide in Him, and He in us, because, as those who love Him, He has given us the gifts and graces of His Spirit. 14. Nor need ye fear to trust our words, for we apostles have seen with our eyes, have looked upon, and our hands have handled Him who was the Word of Life, and were eye-witnesses of His majesty, and beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,[2] and can thus bear true witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15. The "abiding in God," that is, in loving union to Him, in which true Christianity consists, rests, therefore, not on cunningly devised fables like the dreams of the Gnostics, but on historical truth, and can be realised only in those who heartily accept this apostolic testimony. Whosoever therefore shall confess as his true belief that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. This "confession" is thus another test of our being true Christians, just as love of each other is.[3] 16. And we, thus confessing, know as the ground of our doing so, and have believed, the love which God has in our case. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.[4]

If to dwell in love mean to dwell in God, it throws a clear light on our happy future.

17. And for this end is love perfected on our side, that we

[1] Rom v. 10.
[2] John i. 14; 1 John i. 1; 2 Pet. i. 16.
[3] Verses 7, 8.
[4] Verses 8, 13, 12.

may have confidence in the day of Judgment; because as He, Christ, is in God, and God in Him,[1] even so are we, in this passing world, as He is in the world of light. 18. We need have no fear, therefore, of condemnation, since our abiding in love is an abiding in God; indeed, by this we are, even now, one with our future Judge. There is no fear, then, in such love: but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has the dread of punishment: and so, he that fears is not made perfect in love. 19. We love, because He first loved us, so that all true love "is of God." 20. But what is implied in this love, which is Christian perfection, may be seen in the fact, that if any man say, "I love God," and hate his brother, he is a liar: for he who loveth not his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21. And not only must it be so from the nature of things: we have an express commandment on the point; for this commandment have we from Him, Christ, that he who loves God love his brother also.

V. 1. It must indeed be so, for whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, not, like our opponents, a mere man, on whom a shadowy Christ descends, at times, is begotten of God: and whoever loves Him, God, that begat him, and thus is His Father, loves him also that is begotten of Him that is, who is His brother.[2] So inseparable are love of God and love of true Christians. Hence also, the love of God is a proof of the genuineness of our love of His children, 2. for hereby also we know that we love the children of God, when we love God Himself, and do His commandments. 3. For this is the only true love of God, that we keep His commands: and this is no unattainable condition, for His commandments are not grievous, since the fulfilment of the one—the believing on the Son of God, of itself leads to the fulfilment of the other.[3]

How faith, by obeying the commandments, overcomes the world.

[1] Chap. ii. 6; iii. 5, 7, 16; John xiv. 20; xvii. 21, 23. [2] John viii. 42.
[3] Chap. ii. 5; 2 John 6; John xiv. 15, 21; Matt. xi. 30; xxiii. 4.

4. For whatsoever is begotten of God, and hence has true spiritual life in it, overcometh the world, and this is the source of the victory that overcometh the world—our faith. 5. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is, in the apostolic sense, the Son of God? This belief is the living power by which we become ideal Christians. 6. This faith, in contrast to that taught by the false teachers, is a faith in Him as He who came by water and by blood, the water of baptism, at the opening of His work as Messiah, consecrating Him as such, and the blood, His death on the cross, which closed it on earth,—so that He is not a phantom-Christ, as the false teachers say;—even a faith in Jesus Christ, who came not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. 7. And it is the Holy Spirit Himself that bears witness to this because it is true, and the Spirit *is* the truth. For Christ comes by water in the bestowal of the gifts and graces which accompany the public confession of Him, by sincere penitents,[1] and He comes by blood, for, "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ?"[2] the Divine Spirit being poured out on all who partake of these rites in spirit and in truth, and thus witnessing for our Lord.

The seventh verse in the Authorised Version is found in none of the Fathers, from the third to the fifth century, though they discussed the doctrine of the Trinity so vigorously, and in no Greek manuscript earlier than the fifteenth century. It is first met, about A.D. 400, in the Latin Church, from which it was ultimately smuggled into the Greek text, through the Vulgate, into which it had been inserted, as a gloss, by some unknown transcriber, in the Middle Ages. It is now, however, rejected by all scholars.

[1] Acts ii. 38.

[2] 1 Cor. x. 16; xi. 23–26; Acts ix. 31; 1 Cor. xii. 7, 13; John i. 32, 33; iii. 5.

8. For there are, thus, three who bear witness to our teaching, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one testimony. 9. If we receive the witness of men, as we do—for the Law says that the testimony of two men is true,[1] the threefold witness of God, as just named, is greater: for the witness of God is this, that He has not only, Himself, borne witness concerning His Son, but has borne it in this threefold way, besides.[2] Moreover, 10. he that believeth truly on the Son of God hath the witness within himself:[3] and, on the other hand, he that believeth not God has, once for all, made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. 11. And the witness is this, besides all the rest, that God has given unto us eternal life, as promised,[4] and this life is in His Son. 12. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God, hath not the life.

Conclusion.

13. These things, in this whole epistle, have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even you who believe on the name of the Son of God. 14. And having this certain knowledge that we already have eternal life, this is the confidence which we have as regards Him, God, that, if we ask anything that is according to His will, He heareth us; 15. and if we thus know that He hears us, as to whatsoever we ask, we know also that we assuredly have the petitions granted which we have asked of Him. Yet there are limits to our asking. 16. If any man see his brother in the faith sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him his prayer, of life for them that thus sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death—the rejecting Christianity:[5] not concerning this do I say that he should make request. 17. All unrighteousness is sin: but there is a sin not unto death.

18. Yet we know that whosoever is begotten of God sin-

[1] John viii. 17. [2] John v. 32, 37; viii. 18; Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5.
[3] Rom. viii. 16. [4] Chap. ii. 25. [5] Heb. vi. 4–8; x. 26–31.

neth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself from sin, and the Evil One toucheth him not. 19. We further know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in the Evil One. 20. And we also know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an opening of the eyes of our understanding,[1] that we know Him, God, that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ.[2] And this God whom we know, in His Son, is the true God, and eternal life. 21. My little children, guard yourselves from idols, which are no gods.

The preservation of the two short "Epistles of John," through the first centuries, when Christianity was still to a large extent obscure, illiterate, and without organisation beyond that of simple local meetings, or "churches," scattered over the face of the empire, shows that they must have been treasured from the first, in many a lowly Christian circle. They form a twin pair; the creation, evidently, of the same mind and the same heart; identical thoughts and even turns of expression meeting us in both.[3] The few glimpses of doctrine they contain agree with the teaching of the First Epistle, while they are one with both that Epistle and the fourth Gospel, in many words and phrases peculiar to the three.[4] The aim, moreover, of all three is much the same; to strengthen the reader in truth and love, and warn him against the heretical "higher knowledge," or Gnosis, then, and so long, in vogue, among the disputatious, speculative, Greek-Asiatic populations of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt; the

[1] Eph. i. 18. [2] John xvii. 3.

[3] 2 John 1 and 3 John 1; 2 John 4 and 3 John 3; 2 John 12 and 3 John 13, 14.

[4] Take, for example, the expressions, "to abide" and to "walk" in God, Christ, the truth, &c., "to see God," "to be of God," "the truth," "to have, or to hear, from the beginning," "to confess," "antichrist," "to witness," "a new commandment," &c., &c.

background of all these compositions being the wholesome doctrine of the twelve apostles.[1] The second and third, however, unlike the first, are strictly letters; with an address and a conclusion, while the writer is called "the presbyter," or "elder"; a name not assumed, to the exclusion of his own, by any other New Testament writer; but used perhaps, in this case, as simply reminding his loved ones of his declining age. Yet as the familiar title of "elder" was felt enough for his identification, John must have been known through the churches by this kindly by-name, as their venerable father, whom they tenderly reverenced as the last survivor of the companions of our Lord; loved by Him, above all the others. That two short leaflets such as these two private letters, even though those of an apostle, should not have been mentioned in the allusions to their sacred writings, by the earliest Christians, is not surprising; their private character, no less than their shortness, keeping them long as only private treasures, cherished in secret through successive generations. They were, indeed, only gradually accepted as written by the Apostle John; even Eusebius[2] speaking of them, at one time, as written by him, and, at another, as not universally honoured as canonical;[3] and the prevailing opinion even in the time of Jerome seems to have been, that they were written by a presbyter John, at Ephesus; not by the apostle.[4] But against this idea, the internal evidence, which is the strongest of all testimony, leaves no room for doubt that the author of the fourth Gospel, and of the three Epistles of John, were the same person, and he no other than the beloved disciple.

[1] 2 John 10; 3 John 5–8.

[2] *C.* 264–340.

[3] Euseb. *Dem. Evan.* iii. 5; "Church Hist." iii. 24, 17; 25, 2.

[4] Jerome lived, *c.* 331–420.

The Second Epistle of John.

The epistle is addressed to "the elect lady," but it is very doubtful whether a private person is intended. It has been usually supposed that John had become acquainted with the sons of the mother of whom he writes, and desires to congratulate her on their having joined the Faith. But the changes from singular to plural; the language of both introduction and conclusion; that of the eighth and tenth verses, which imply a number of grown persons; and, especially, the peculiarity in the fifth verse: "I beseech thee, lady, . . . that we love one another," appear to decide that, not a person but a church, or any one of a number of churches, is intended; John calling it, figuratively,—perhaps as the bride of Christ, "the elect lady," as St. Peter speaks of a church, as "she that is in Babylon."[1] This being so, we can understand how the "lady" is loved of all Christians, and has the truth abiding in her, while only some of her children walk in it.[2] To these, if members of a church, the entreaty to love one another could be fittingly addressed; the brethren and sisterhood walking unbecomingly being addressed as an individual, and thus personified. The "elect sister" who, in verse thirteen, sends greetings, is evidently another church, whose members send salutations to those of the church to which, immediately, the epistle is written. Nor is it strange that John should call himself an elder, since St. Peter does the same.[3]

Greeting.

[1] 1 Pet. v. 13. [2] 2 John 1, 2, 4. [3] 1 Pet. v. 13.

1. The presbyter to the elect lady, and her children, the church community, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth; 2. for the truth's sake, which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever; 3. Grace, mercy, and peace, are and shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Warning, and rules of bearing, towards all, but mainly towards those who have left the congregation.

4. I rejoice greatly that I have found some of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father. 5. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning; that we love one another. 6. And this is love, to God, the brethren and all men, that we should walk after His commandments.[1] And this is the command ment—the truth, even as ye heard it from us, apostles, from the beginning, telling you that ye should walk in it. 7. For many deceivers are gone forth from the churches into the world—they that confess not that Jesus cometh in the flesh. This false teaching is the deceiver and the anti-christ. 8. Look to yourselves, therefore, that ye lose not the advances in spiritual well-being which ye have already wrought out for yourselves, but rather see that ye receive a full reward by your fidelity. 9. For whosoever goes forward, beyond our teaching, and abideth not in the bounds of the apostolic teaching respecting the Christ, hath not God:[2] but he that abideth in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son. 10. If any one come to you and wish to play the teacher and bring not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting of welcome,[3] 11. for he that gives him such friendly greeting has part in his evil works.

[1] 1 John v. 2, 3. [2] 1 John ii. 23. [3] 2 Tim. iii. 6.

The "false teachers" of the apostolic age were, as a rule, itinerant Jews and others, passing from place to place, seeking a livelihood by petty trade, or as mechanics; the humblest Jew or Greek being a frantic theologian, in many cases. It was the passion of the times to speculate on all high subjects; beggar "philosophers" abounding everywhere, whose restless tongues and subtle brains filled the air with crude audacities on all questions, and, among others, on morals, God, the angels, the human and divine in the Christ, and much else. Many maintained that immorality was only an innocent exercise of Christian "liberty," and even that it indirectly honoured God, since the more sin, the greater the glory of divine grace. Such persons were specially dangerous, from their unsettling the minds of converts, and stirring up the slumbering love of novelty, so engrained in the half-Greek, half-Oriental mind of Asia Minor. As to keeping aloof from any intercourse with such misleading talkers, a tradition has been preserved that John acted on the admonition he gives; for it is said, that having come upon a heretic, Cerinthus, in a public bath, he at once left it, lest it should be thrown down by God on such a corrupter of the faith.

Conclusion.

12. Having many things to write to you, I would rather not write them with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you, and to speak, face to face, that your joy may be made full. 13. The children of your elect sister—the members of the church from which I write—salute thee.

The object of the Third Epistle of John is to urge the liberal exercise of hospitality towards wandering preachers.[1]

[1] 3 John 5–8.

They were to be cordially received, and sent off on their further journeys with friendly companionship at starting; this duty resting on the brethren, and especially on their head men. An example of neglect of this is given, in the case of Diotrephes,[1] who is held up to scorn for it; while another, Demetrius, is commended for his hearty fulfilment of it.[2] The epistle was carried to him to whom it was addressed, by itinerant preachers.[3]

What "Gaius" is intended by the worthy to whom the epistle is sent, is unknown. It may have been one of that name, at Pergamos, who is said to have been made "bishop" of the little church there, by John, at a later time. With less probability, however, it has been suggested that the Gaius of Corinth, baptized by Paul, and praised by him for his wide hospitality, is intended.[4]

The epistles are doubly interesting as affording a glimpse of the conditions under which Christianity was originally spread. John writes to the leaders of the little churches, and to the churches as a whole, on this humble subject of entertaining passing evangelists, and does not scruple to rebuke and expose by name, any principal men who have not received him or his helpers; as when an ambitious chief man, Diotrephes, did not receive "us."[5] In his vanity and heartless pharisaic pride he had fancied that he could do without the apostle or his humble emissaries, for he "loved to have the pre-eminence" among the brethren, and wished no rivals beside his little throne. The churches, as a whole, are represented as firmly opposing the seductions of Gnosticism, but they have their internal troubles; only a proportion of them walking in

[1] 3 John 9, 10. [2] 3 John 12. [3] 3 John 5–7.
[4] Acts xx. 4; 1 Cor. i. 14. [5] 3 John 9.

the truth. Above the little brief authority of the primitive "bishop," or president of a congregation, when exercised amiss, stands that of the apostle, who knows how to put down such a Triton among minnows to his proper level.[1] How striking a contrast to the ecclesiasticism of the present day, or of the Middle Ages, from which the inflated officialism of all the churches has come; human nature, even in orders, remaining very human.

The Third Epistle of John.

1. The elder, or presbyter, to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in the truth.

2. Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers. 3. For I rejoiced greatly when journeying brethren came and bare witness to thy steadfast abiding in the truth, as shown openly, even by the way thou walkest in the truth. 4. For greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Exhortation to show hospitality to journeying preachers.

5. Beloved, thou doest a faithful work—one truly Christian—in whatever thou doest towards those who, besides being brethren, are also strangers; 6. who have borne testimony before the church assembly here, as to thy truth, so to thy love, in generous hospitality: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their further journey with a tenderness worthy of God, whose work they are carrying out; 7. because they have gone forth as evangelists and missionaries for the sake of the Name, and take nothing from the heathen, letting themselves depend for their support on Christians only, which makes them no less worthy of kind reception than in need

[1] 3 John 10.

of it. 8. We ought, therefore, to entertain such heartily, that we may be fellow-workers with them in the spread of the truth.

An instance, however, has occurred, of unworthy behaviour in this matter, but happily it has its contrast in another case.

9. I wrote somewhat—a short letter—to the church to which you—Gaius—belong: but it has either been lost or Diotrephes has kept it back from the brethren, as it spoke of his blameworthiness; for this person, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them,—the church members where he lives—will not entertain us,—I mean those whom I send out; and they have let me know this, so that I now write another private letter to you, Gaius. 10. Therefore, since he acts so, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words, as not of our school; and not content with this, he not only does not himself receive the brethren I send as itinerant evangelists, but, still more, he forbids those to do so who would receive them, and even casts them out of the church for being willing to entertain them: so narrow-minded and hostile is he to our preaching. 11. Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good, for he that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil has not seen God. 12. Imitate, therefore, such a worthy as you have in Demetrius, for he has the witness of all, as a noble sample of Christian hospitality, and their witness is that of the truth itself; yea, we also bear witness; and thou, Gaius, knowest that our witness is true.

Conclusion. Virtually identical with that of the Second Epistle.

13. I had many things to write to thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen. 14. But I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be

unto thee. The friends in this church salute thee. Salute the friends in your church by name.

Such are the words that close the New Testament, for, as we have seen, "Revelation" was written before the three Epistles of John. The fourth Gospel had been given to the little world of Christianity, ten or fifteen years before the three Epistles, which are marked, in every line, by signs of the old age of the apostle. If he be supposed to have been thirty at the date of the Crucifixion, he would be nearing seventy at the fall of Jerusalem, and if the Gospel and the Epistles be assigned to the next twenty-five years, he would be about ninety when these three last gifts of inspiration were first read by those to whom they had been sent.

It is very striking to find that, outside the New Testament, we know virtually nothing of the life or work of any of the apostles. Traditions spring up, indeed, more and more plentifully as centuries pass, but contemporary and reliable notices of the founders of our faith are not to be had. Hence, all that can be told of St. John is more or less legendary; yet there is such a fascination about the last survivor of the immediate companions of our Lord, that even doubtful hints respecting him are precious.

As we are aware from a statement in the fourth Gospel, it was an idea among the apostles themselves, from some words of Christ before His Ascension, that John would never die. But this misapprehension he was careful to correct in after years, by telling us that Jesus did not say that he would not die, but "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Yet the great age to which he lived, and the belief that Christ's coming was

close at hand, kept alive the original fancy, so that even when he was long dead, it was widely believed that he was only asleep, not inanimate, in the dust; Augustine relating how persons had told him they had seen the earth moving with his breath, over his grave.[1] Indeed, it was a fixed belief even in the Middle Ages that he was still alive.[2]

But, dismissing this dream, some personal traditions are very interesting. One of the sweetest is that of his meeting with one who had been a convert, but had gone astray, and had even sunk to be the captain of a band of robbers, in the mountains near Ephesus. I give it in the words of Clement of Alexandria, as reported by Eusebius.[3] Making his centre, we are told, at Ephesus, John was in the habit of going out from it, to the parts round, to appoint "bishops" over congregations, or to found new churches, or ordain such persons as he approved, to the ministry. On one occasion, after having thus set apart some one to the charge of a church, he lovingly commended to his care a fine youth standing near; the result being that the "presbyter," taking the lad to his own home, led him gradually to such a frame as was followed by his being baptized. But, after a time, unfortunately, the young man, thinking himself sure of salvation by having this "seal of the Lord," mixed with doubtful companions, and erelong went from bad to worse till he finally, after committing some great crime, became head of a band of robbers. Years after, the church having sent for the apostle again, and the matters which had brought him being settled, the old man asked about the youth. "Alas," said the presbyter, "he is dead." "How did he die?"

[1] Tract. 124, *in Joann.* [2] Niceph. *Hist. Eccles.* ii. 42.
[3] *Hist. Eccles.* iii. 23.

asked St. John. "He is dead to God," was the answer; "he has turned a robber." On this, the apostle rent his garment, and told them to get him a horse and a guide to go to the robber's haunts. Riding up into the mountains, he was erelong taken prisoner by some of the young man's band, but, instead of resisting, only asked them to lead him to their captain, for he had come to see him. Noticing the apostle approach, the guilty one, recognising him, turned to flee, but John cried out to him, on no account to do so; that he would not surely run from his father; his old, defenceless father; and called him, tenderly, his son. Then, when the poor creature, hearing such sweet words, stopped, and came up with shame to his aged friend—John continued—"Have compassion on me, my son; fear not. Thou mayest still live. I will plead with Christ for thee, and if needs be, I will gladly die for thee. Believe that Christ has sent me." Hearing such things, the past came back to the poor backslider, and laying down his weapons, he threw his arms round the old man; weeping, and broken down in deep penitence. It seemed to him as if he had no hope of being forgiven, but the apostle would not let him despair, and kneeling down with him, there and then, commended him to Christ as a wanderer who had come back to the fold; and then, feeling sure that the lost sheep was welcomed once more to the fold, he kissed his right hand, and led him back to the church.

Another story is that of his coming out of the bath in which he found the heretic Cerinthus, as already told.

When the apostle left Judæa is entirely unknown, though we may feel confident that he remained there till the death of Mary, the mother of our Lord, set him free.

That he was not in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's last visit appears certain, from his not being mentioned, nor can we suppose that he settled in Ephesus before the death of the Apostle of the Gentiles, since he would naturally refrain from intruding on the sphere of a fellow-apostle. But, apart from the inferences in the passage respecting the conversion of the robber, we have hardly anything to help us to fill in an outline of his work, after he took up his abode in the great city of Diana. We may dismiss as the fancy of a later age, fond of reviving Judaism in the churches, the tradition of his wearing in his old age, a plate of gold on his brow, engraved with the name of Jehovah, like that worn on his turban by the Jewish high-priest.[1] Far more probable, because natural in a loving nature, is a later tradition, that he took pleasure in a pet bird—a partridge, it is said—defending himself by reminding a friend that the mind, like a bow, needed to be, from time to time, unbent. But the most beautiful story is that which refers to his extreme age. When past all power to teach or travel, he used, we are told, to be carried about in a litter, and while thus being borne through the streets, would ever and anon, on seeing knots of Christians watching him, murmur to them, "Little children, love one another!" When he died is not known, but it must have been very nearly, if not quite at, the close of the first century, and then, at last, the disciple whom Jesus loved went to be for ever with his Lord. It is striking to find how age tempered the whole nature of the once fiery "son of thunder," but he still shows to the very last his unbending sternness against whatever opposes the truth, in his requiring the brethren utterly

[1] Euseb. *Hist. Eccles.* iii. 31; v. 24.

to refuse hospitality to a false teacher. Yet the Sun of Eternal love, in Christ, shining, in his case, into a soul exceptionally sympathetic and receptive, gradually transformed his whole being, more and more, into a reflection of the perfect image of Him whom he supremely loved. "The Son of Man" is to John, at all times, the eternal Son of God, shining amidst the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Though man, He is the Uncreated Word; and now wears, for the abiding consolation of His still mortal brethren, the form He bore on earth, and retains all His human sympathies and memories, amidst the glory of the Father. Thither, on the strong wings of immortal love, the thoughts of John followed Him, piercing further into the mysteries of His divine yet human nature, than any other of the apostles; so that the churches took for his emblem the eagle, which is said to look without blenching at the unclouded sun.

The last of the apostles to leave us, he has now for eighteen hundred years been translated to the all-revealing noon of heaven, and in that golden air must have become, age after age, more like his Divine Master, in whom dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily. There are some, we are told, privileged to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and we may be sure that John is one of them, for his Master loved him here, and eternity is only the widening of the stream which in this life we call Time, and a change of skies makes no change or abatement of holy affections. The beloved disciple of earth must, therefore, be the beloved disciple still, in the world of light, for Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and the love that lay on His bosom here, must grow with the ages, there.

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